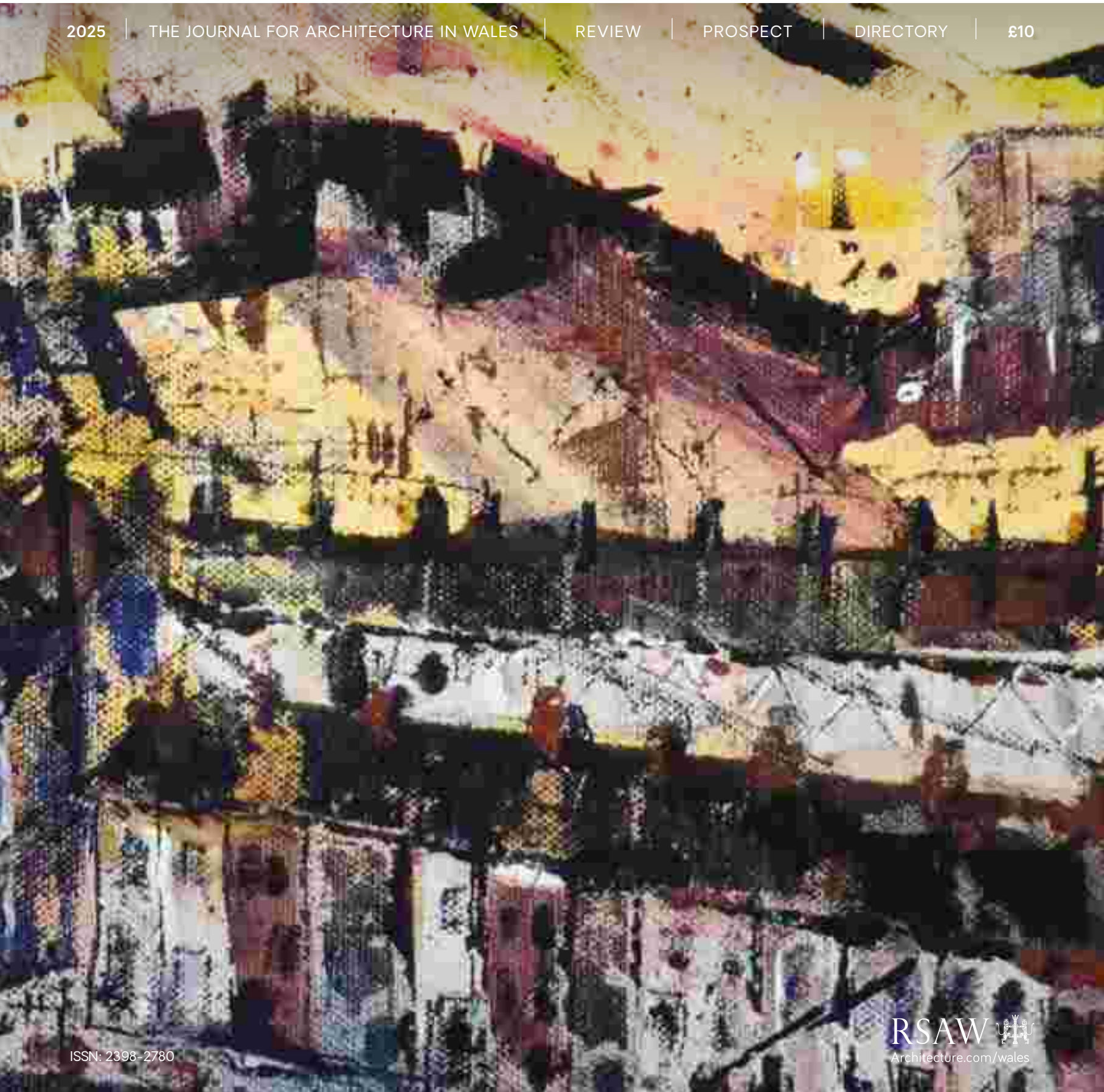


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The Royal Society of Architects in Wales (RSAW)
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our advocacy work in government, public and private
sectors, we champion well-designed buildings and
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rydym yn hyrwyddo adeiladau a lleoedd sydd wedi'u
dylunio'n dda ledled Cymru.

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RSAW President, Alan Francis

I was very pleased to note a high turnout for the RSAW presidential election last year. I wondered how my election statement would connect with architects in Wales, but it seems to have struck a chord.

Last year, I gave myself the challenge of visiting as many practices as I could, and although there are more to go, it has been an informative journey.

My presidential statement focused on a single point – greater autonomy for the RSAW. I raised the matter during my practice visits, and sought out reflections from architects, young and old, on their sense of connectedness to the RIBA and the RSAW.

I remember well, during my own further education years, how keen I was to get the ‘RIBA’ suffix, but I didn’t know much about the institute itself. It was interesting to learn from RSAW members how little prominence is given to it by younger architects today. That’s an issue that I know is also close to the heart of RIBA president, Chris Williamson.

So, if the institute’s letters after your name are no longer as important or valued as they once were, what matters to architects in Wales today, in terms of support and benefits that the RIBA and/or the RSAW might offer?

A number of those I met on my visits were unclear about the membership benefits or the organisation, a task I know the RIBA is also

‘A subtle change – devolution, not separation. And developing a business plan that meets that change will not be easy, but if it’s underpinned by emotional as well as practical nuance, there’s a real chance it will be a force for good.’

keen to discover more about. Almost all were excited by the RSAW conferences, and looked forward to the next issue of *Touchstone*, but the RIBA (Portland Place) was too far away to be of relevance, and few made use of its services. This did differ according to the size of practice. Larger practices organize their own CPD, but the RIBA’s were useful and important to the smaller ones, for example.

What was intriguing was that Welsh connections were seen as important – the idea of a Welsh collective seemed to open up discussion more than one focused around the RSAW as an extension of the RIBA. Many I met wondered why, as a devolved nation, we were not treated in exactly the same way as Scotland and North Ireland.

The RSAW is not a statutory consultee to the Welsh Government – professional bodies have tended not to be, with Constructing Excellence Wales and the Design Commission for Wales stepping in to that gap – but given Wales’s own planning act, building regulations, building safety act, and, of course, the small matter of our language act, the RSAW needs to be seeking closer ties and more influential positions with the Senedd. At least then we might be able to challenge local authority policies more effectively, and differentiate ourselves with the relevant minister on crucial issues like housing.

It’s unlikely at this stage, that the RSAW could forge its own path entirely separately. Notwithstanding my comments above, we have a high number of RIBA members as a proportion of ARB registered architects in Wales at the moment – far higher than the UK proportion overall – but still only around 600 RIBA members in total. Curiously, this is far smaller proportionally than

the number of members of the RIAS in Scotland (5,000?), given our population is less than 60% of Scotland’s. We are generally referred to by the RIBA as a ‘nation’ (though not consistently) and not a ‘region’, and we attend the ‘nations and regions’ meetings set up by the RIBA that includes RIAS (Scotland), RSUA (Ulster) and RIAI (Republic of Ireland). So, the principle is established then?

However, maybe there’s a genuine route to greater autonomy that would be to the benefit of the RIBA and the RSAW. Welsh Government planning policy, Building Safety Regulator matters, and the like are serious concerns in Wales that are not currently covered by Portland Place. The RIBA’s political and policy language at RIBA Council, and in general advice to members, is consistently phrased around policy at Westminster, which applies to all RIBA regions but not necessarily to us in Wales.

Of course many members living and working in Wales are engaged in projects in England, but the RSAW is there primarily for those living and working in Wales. For the majority of practices, the relevant concerns are home-grown. I suspect also, that if we are to have a greater influence in Cardiff Bay, and with individual authorities and policy groups, a dedicated, more autonomous RSAW may have greater credence.

So, perhaps over the next two years a slightly different RSAW may evolve. One that has a new relationship with the RIBA, but to the benefit of both.

RIBA’s Westminster-centred focus is not surprising considering the majority of its members are governed from there. However, Wales needs dedicated support for its own nation.

I am excited by the prospect of us joining

hands to create a stronger more independent community, that is rooted in our small country, but still has its links with the RIBA.

A subtle change – devolution, not separation. And developing a business plan that meets that change will not be easy, but if it’s underpinned by emotional as well as practical nuance, there’s a real chance it will be a force for good.

RSAW membership, with a unique offer. A different relationship and scope of support, is one consideration.

There will be a myriad of questions surrounding many current topics, such as: supporting architects or architecture; *Touchstone’s* promotion of the profession in Wales – or a critical friend seeking higher standards – and how we ensure the future quality of its output; ensuring architects in Wales are not undervalued; responding to the *Building Safety Act 2022* in Wales; ensuring we still seek beautiful outcomes and are not client-driven solely into technical competence; key projects in Wales being delivered by Welsh architects; and influence on local authorities. We are what we create, aren’t we?

It’s a two-way approach – the challenge of seeking a more autonomous direction on the one hand, while on the other, continuing to meet the practical day-to-day issues that confront us every day. In the RSAW team of Elinor, Bethan and Tom we are lucky that we have three very responsible and able people dedicated to the task. I hope I can support them and fulfil my election promise over the next two years.

Alan Francis

RSAW President | 30 September 2025

Housing matters

Of course it does; access to a decent home is a socio-economic fundamental. There are youthful street protests across Europe, South America, everywhere; priced out of a home by exorbitant rents and house prices they are angry – they have been failed. And yet the UK's youth appears curiously passive: are they simply waiting for the multi-million pound property leader of Reform UK to sort it for them?

The inter-generational churn of homes that once allowed the young to gain a home has been disrupted by longer life expectancy, the elderly understandably hanging on to their memories and housing assets until the very last moment as their protection against astronomic private-sector care-home costs. Our modern world, in the UK at least, has long ago dismantled multi-generation households. Everyone makes their own independent way, dispersed geographically, but at a considerable social cost. The lonely elderly must look out for themselves. Some of the young wait to inherit, only to find the house sale price frittered away on care-home bills. Others make a killing, a capital-gain inheritance that simply fuels the widening gap between the 5% and the rest. Alongside all that, no political party seems willing to tackle the further inequalities of the council tax system, unreformed for decades, or use stamp duty levels to curb ever rising house price inflation or link it to energy efficiency.

Will ramping up new housing supply sort it, the Labour Party's 1.5 million-homes strategy? Unlikely – there are simply too many big beasts to slay in the time frame of a parliament. The counties' local development plans (LDPs) should deliver, but as long as they are led and constrained by the private-landowner 'candidate-sites' process, those vastly inflated land prices will cripple the required supply. The housebuilders will further control supply to ensure they can balance those exorbitant 'hope value' land costs. This ensures the houses most needed, don't arrive or come grudgingly.

The LDPs take forever to be confirmed. Understaffed and overworked county planning departments suffocate under the mounting layers and layers of well-intentioned regulations; their colleagues are tempted away by developers paying better wages to undertake creative strategic planning, while those left behind battle with arguing how to say 'no' or 'yes' to the market forces encircling them aided and abetted by the nimbys. Despite the introduction of the UK-wide *Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023*, there seems to be a pathological resistance in Wales to using compulsory purchase powers on land assembly potentially removing the 'hope value'



Tip: by Barbara Castle (2017)



Aneurin Bevan at the award winning Cae Tyddyn council estate in Llanrwst 1950

from that land purchase cost. Don't we remember how we built new towns? Wales needs to get on the front foot.

History tells us that the private sector will never provide for those most in need. They will always balk at the up-front cost of meeting progressive decarbonisation regulations and coping with climate-change impacts. The public sector must lead. So in Wales the Welsh Government's Innovative Housing Programme (IHP) launched in 2017 has produced progressive exemplars delivered by registered social landlords or housing associations. In the process they are breaking long-standing social taboos (p. 6); others prove that private individuals are quite happy purchasing homes with air-source heat pumps, PVs, batteries, MHVR, off-site assembled Welsh-modular-timber super-insulated-air-tight fabric, and European triple-glazed windows. But the sizeable state loans that have made this possible can simply add fuel to the private market's argument – give us the same and we will do likewise.

However, there are fundamental doubts about this Gadarene rush for 1.5 million new homes. The editor of the *Architects' Journal*, Emily Booth, questioned its very premise, arguing 'you can't build 1.5 million brand new homes and stay within critical carbon budgets'. Shouldn't we tackle what exists, the poor energy performance of our existing stock, the empty homes, the tourism industry abuse of second homes, and Airbnb driving home prices out of local people's reach? Again, the Welsh Government has taken a lead. The Optimised RetroFit Programme (ORP), which grew out of the 2019 Jofeh report, (*Touchstone* 2021 pp. 30–32 and *Touchstone* 2022, pp. 47–49) was launched in August 2020, but there

appears to be no meaningful feedback after five years in operation. Is the government finding, as the 80% of Welsh home-owners are finding, that there are very deep fundamental challenges at all levels of delivering these much needed and urgent retrofits?

Meanwhile, the architectural media salivate over quirky one-off alternative home delivery projects, the over-excitement about self-build, the tiny number of co-housing projects, the community land trusts (so few in Wales), the likes of: the Mayday Saxonvale community-led, master-planned development in Frome working with Studio SAAR; the Phoenix Estate by Ash Sakula Architects for Human Nature in Lewes; the nearly Stirling Prize-shortlisted Hazelmead project of 53 homes at Bridport by Barefoot Architects; even *The Observer* promoted the 75-flat Grønne Eng (Green Meadow) development in Copenhagen. All of these are fascinating; each is a glimpse of a better life – but they are a distraction. When one investigates what it actually takes – and who has the resources and time to take on such brave and optimistic adventures – then it becomes obvious that it is not a strategic delivery option for those most in need.

So what do we do?

A manifesto for May 2026

Implement Mark Drakeford's proposal for a tax on vacant land. Reform the Council Tax bands to properly reflect the inflationary rise in house prices and use the money generated towards the compulsory purchase of land at current-use value for public-rent homes. Link stamp duty to energy efficiency and alter the stamp duty levels to capture more public income for the delivery of new homes. Tax capital gains on top-level house

sale prices discounting home improvement costs. Learn lessons from John Lovell's Tirion Homes experiment with its 50-year management and maintenance commitment. Own up honestly to the public on the timescale to deliver realistic retrofit given the skills' deficit – according to one source a need for 12,000 FTE and 2,800 more plumbers for heat-pump installation. Even up VAT on new-build and retrofit. Halt all right-to-buy schemes. Boost pay for council planners and shift their focus to strategic planning, using compulsory purchase powers to the full so that development occurs where it is needed not where powerful landowners desire it. Use the Development Bank of Wales for compulsory land purchase or reinstate a public works loan board offering loans to authorities at 2% interest. Change the rules overnight on mortgages where loans can only be based on three times one person's salary. Allow more flexible procurement arrangements for SME house designer/builders. Erase the word 'affordable' (from housing discourse); insert instead 'public rent' (80% of market rent that currently defines 'affordable' is a joke to those most in need.) Ensure much speedier approvals in the planning system from SuDS regulators, Natural Resources Wales, and focus on the essentials of ecological, archaeological and biodiversity surveys that have become a gravy train for specialist consultants. Ensure full feedback on current ORP schemes. Accept that one has to better balance meeting the Welsh Development Quality Requirements and meeting decarbonisation demands in retrofit – one can't always have 'Rolls-Royce' standards. Cap rents across the board. Pursue and compulsorily purchase empty homes. Mandate a publicly accessible register of all public and private land and publish the development potential of all publicly owned underused land. Ensure, as the chartered institute of housing cymru notes, that all of the unspent £71 million of section 106 monies is fully spent for public betterment. Ensure there is full public transparency on development viability claims. Oh, and while we're at it, let's try and raise our architecture ambition to at least build on all the fine estate layout, home-planning and elevational skills that such early pioneers as Parker and Unwin demonstrated 100 years ago.

Let's get at least some of this done because, if not, Shelter Cymru's claim that it would take over 35 years at current delivery rates to meet the needs of those waiting for a social home, is simply too insulting to our younger generation. Put more bluntly, as Lyndsey German does, the current context is such that the current system if left unaltered 'is a direct transfer from the needy to the greedy'. Housing matters.

Patrick Hannay: Editor



Leading edge

1

Does the place for new homes called Gwynfaen on the edge of Swansea, overlooking the Loughor Estuary to Gower, set a new benchmark for the design of 'place-making' decarbonised homes for Wales? A lot may be riding on that answer. Patrick Hannay reports.

The late Carl Sargeant's launch of the Welsh Government's 'Innovative Housing Programme' (IHP) in 2017 was a memorable moment. If we were going to do more and better in new housing provision in Wales, consume far less carbon, have more sensitive place making, handle climate-change induced flooding and overheating, and lower energy bills for residents, then it looked like yet again that the state was going to have to give a lead by putting its money where its mouth was. The market was always going to drag its feet.

According to Elfed Roberts, Pobl Group's head of sustainability and innovation, 'no other

project within the group to date has aspired to Gwynfaen's decarbonisation and place-making ambitions'. It 'sets a benchmark to what we can and will achieve by 2030'. Pobl, the not-for-profit housing association, is the largest in Wales, managing 23,000 homes.

The ambitions for Gwynfaen were very high. It's almost 75% complete and due for full completion in late 2026. In year three of the IHP programme, Pobl was awarded £9.5 million by the Welsh Government, the 'single largest IHP grant awarded to any project over this four-year programme', said Roberts. That partly allowed them to provide a rich tenure mix, but avoid the charge that viability of the project was only guaranteed by sufficient sales to private owners. The mix is 60% social rent, 34% outright sales, one rent to own, and 49% shared ownership.

It ticks a lot of the right boxes. The scheme's layout is properly landscape-led. Environmental Dimension Partnership came on board first in March 2018. Stride Treglown was hired February 2019, gaining full planning permission for the scheme in December that year.

Through the site's design evolution, the original 165 homes became 144. Generous green spaces at the site's higher density centre (1)



- 1 A landscape-led scheme. Generous green spaces at the scheme's higher density centre, overlooked by service outlets and, above, social-rent apartments.
- 2 Early conceptual sketch of site strategy. Two key landscaped views carrying sustainable drainage swales down an east-west site level drop of eight metres from that centre.



2



‘In year three of the IHP programme, Pobl was awarded £9.5 million by the Welsh Government, the “single largest IHP grant awarded to any project over this four-year programme,” said Elfed Roberts.’



- 3 Aerial view looking east, early summer 2025; surface-water retention ponds and nature spaces can be seen along the whole of the western boundary.
- 4 Early exploratory sketch showing very different resolution to public/private boundaries from the solution finally adopted. This sketch did not embrace car access challenges.
- 5 Site plan. The scheme's new road infrastructure does not create a cul de sac but is connected to the three existing site access points. A large playground on the northern edge already exists.
- 6 The many varied landscape existed contexts into which the scheme's new landscape structure was knitted. The two hundred new trees are yet to be fully planted.

and two key landscaped views carrying flood-mitigation rills down an east-west site level drop of eight metres from that centre (2). They lead to generous flood mitigation ponds and nature spaces along the whole of the western boundary that then connect via the rights-of-way paths to the natural environment of the Loughor estuary (5,6). It was absolutely vital, said Roberts, that homes and gardens did not make an impenetrable wall between the site and all that natural landscape. You see it, and you can walk into it. You can walk to most other things. The new movement network of the site is fully integrated into the surrounding street networks. This is not a suburban cul de sac. Local buses are regular. Schools, health facilities, a care home and shops, are all within 1,000 metres of the site.

The homes, regardless of tenure, all have air-source heat pumps, PVs, triple-glazed timber windows with 5% recycled aluminium facing, battery storage, energy monitoring software from Sero, an EPC A and SAP 96 rating, and MHVR working to AECB carbon-lite Passivhaus standards. There are future rooms-in-the-roof potential through panellised roof construction and high air tightness of less than one air change per hour at 50 pascals pressure. This is properly ambitious stuff.

You cannot achieve all this unless there is a massive uptick in building delivery and assembly skills. This was a major part of Carl Sargeant's policy intention behind the IHP programme, informed by the *More I Better* research document by the Welsh School of Architecture's Ed Green and Wayne Forster. Add to that mix the urgent seriousness of lowering embodied carbon and you end up at Gwynfaen with the Sevenoaks Modular (SOM) off-site, timber-framed wall and



The Longhouse
3 bedroom, 5 person



The Terrace
2 bedroom, 4 person

roof, super-insulated panel systems throughout (12, 13), externally finished on site with either render or larch cladding. (They hoped for stone slips as well – more of that later.)

SOM is based 13 miles away from the Gwynfaen site, a big embodied energy tick. All the Welsh timber for the framing came from Pontrilas Sawmills just outside the Welsh border, 66 miles away. Woodknowledge Wales's fierce lobbying of the Welsh Government over years is now leading to policies and action on increasing Welsh timber production for house building. More embodied energy ticks.

Jonathan Hale, the founder of SOM, is also the group chairman of the Hale Group, of which Hale Construction was the contractor for Gwynfaen. You need consistent innovation and coordination on- and off-site if you want another big uptick in quality

But what of the architecture? Here one enters fascinating territory and this is important because Rob Wheaton, Stride Treglown's project architect for Gwynfaen, was also the lead figure in the January 2025 launch of the *Tai ar y Cyd* pattern book for housing, signed up to by a group of 23 social housing providers in Wales – RSLs, county councils and housing associations.

In the Design Commission for Wales's 2020 publication *Places for Life 2*, Wheaton presented Gwynfaen arguing that it would 'set the standard for future residential developments in Wales' and 'disrupt the housing market for the better'. In the



The Coach House
3 bedroom, 3 person



- 7 Early CGI of sustainable drainage swale landscaping to one of the key views to the Loughor estuary. The built reality has a more prominent physical boundary/barrier to the swale.
- 8 Early CGI of western boundary; the built reality is less free flowing between the housing and the landscape for public safety reasons, and for fitting the scheme to the site contours.

9–11 Three of the main house types (there are 24 small variations on these to adjust to context).



simple fact that all houses for sale at Gwynfaen have air-source heat pumps, PVs, battery storage, and MHVR kit, and, according to Roberts, all purchasers are happy with them, that alone should hopefully make the private-market providers have pause for thought. However, we should also note that seeking necessary NHBC approval for the homes for sale, Stride Treglown's intentions to have recycled foam glass ground slabs to replace concrete, and natural hydraulic lime screeds plus stone slips, were all roundly rejected by NHBC. Nevertheless, much of what has been learnt through Gwynfaen will underpin the public-sector pattern book.

Pobl's Elfed Roberts confirmed that a major factor in Stride Treglown winning the three-stage tender for the architecture commission for Gwynfaen was the practice's detailed, and in his view, sensitive analysis of Carmarthenshire's rural settlement architecture and place-making qualities – seeking to give Gwynfaen a distinct rural (not suburban) language and thus a sense of connectedness to place. (Equally, Wheaton's Passivhaus expertise and passion confirmed Pobl's selection of architect.) That spatial, form and material analysis underpins Stride Treglown's proposal of a restrained material palette, the simplicity of volumetric forms, the linear continuity of buildings (not necessarily always terraces), the execution of edge details, and the pattern of densification built up around shared, open and or green spaces. There are in fact 24 house types, but many of these are adjustments to certain site layouts, contexts constraints.

At one level, given the incompleteness of the scheme – there are still over 200 trees to be planted and the road finishes are not yet at finished levels – and the fact that all the new landscape has had to cope with the drought and heat of last summer, one has to reserve some judgement until the scheme has fully bedded in. But there are some possibly telling indicators that should make us wary of seeing this scheme as the totally convincing ground-breaking architecture for future residential development in Wales.

There are seeming incidences of disconnect at a detailed level. The rural settlement precedents didn't have SuDS-designed landscape elements built into their DNA, which at Gwynfaen seem to demand clumsy health-and-safety timber fences to delineate them, making for very strange streetscapes. The ground-pattern cross-sections made up of multiple different surfaces (15, 16) seem very fragmented between the homes that front on to those two key linear strategic landscapes. They seem to be new spatial compositions that have few obvious precedents and are simply too bitty. They have become an assembly of not fully coordinated intentions.

There seems a frequent disconnect between the



12,13 (facing page)

Panelised assembly off-site permits easy conversion of attic space. The attic houses the MHVR working to AECB carbon-lite Passivhaus standards.

14 Although intended originally to be tenure-blind, seeking NHBC approval led to full larch cladding only being applied to social-rent homes.

15 Neat way on the 'coach-house' type to ensure parked cars don't visually dominate the street scene, the public pavements and the terraced layout. The SuDS landscaping pattern suggests possible uncertainty over public/private territories and who maintains them. This new landscape ground pattern doesn't have an obvious historic village precedent.

16 The 'longhouse' house types along the scheme's western boundary.

Credits:

Client: Pobl Group
 Landscape master planner: Environmental Dimension Partnership
 Architect: Stride Treglown
 Planning consultant: Asbri Planning
 Civil and structural engineer: WSP
 Mechanical and electrical engineer: Hoare Lea
 Cost consultant and employer's agent: Atkins Realis
 Arboriculturist: ArbTS
 Ecology: Hawkeswood Ecology
 Principal contractor: Hale Construction
 Off-site SIPS: Sevenoaks Modular
 CDM (health and safety): Total CDM
 Photography: Tom Bright

marshalling of drainage engineering decisions and the street landscapes. Street fenestration generally, and on some of the houses on key corners or at turns in the road layout, seem too rigidly determined by fabric performance concerns, ignoring their specific spatial contexts. In terms of housing layout fitting the contours, it seems too often that the placing of house types works in a two-dimensional plan but not in three. The noble intention of making the scheme tenure-blind architecturally has been defeated by NHBC's refusal to countenance larch cladding on homes for sale – a pity – but one has to ask if there really is a historical precedent for timber-clad rural houses locally? Maybe we need to forget UK rural precedents sometimes and just learn from elsewhere in the direction we choose to go. A project may be landscape-led strategically, but it needs integration with the architecture at the level of detailed execution.

These might seem like unnecessary niggles when set against the multitude of progressive steps in housing ambition that have been described earlier. But these architectural concerns will always arise when pattern-book housing thinking (with all its – in this case – noble fabric and assembly performance improvements) comes up against the particularity of place and distinct landforms. Gwynfaen leads in many ways that are admirable, but the model requires some polish architecturally.

touchstones



The notion of a 'Wales Week in London' took on an utterly different dimension in July 2025. 'Gorsedd o'r pridd i'r ddinas – From the city to the earth' was the climactic end to The National Gallery's commissioned 'Triumph of Art' programme of installations across the UK coordinated by Jeremy Deller, to mark the gallery's bicentennial celebrations. This totemic installation assembled over three days in London, rammed with potent symbolism, was assembled and erected first in mid Wales and then dis-assembled and brought to Trafalgar Square (2, 4).

Regular readers of *Touchstone* will be well-aware of the annual summer builds of sizeable timber structures designed and assembled by MARCH students of the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) around its Llwyngwern slate-quarry site. Many of their structures have travelled to festivals across the UK or have been donated to surrounding communities or have simply ended up as part of the CAT infrastructure. This year's ambition was of a wholly different order.

Working alongside key CAT staff, Gwyn Stacey, Dieter Brandstatter, Simon Elliston and Jenny Hall, with structural advice from Momentum, Jeremy Deller and the six student team CLASSH (the first letters of their first names) designed and test assembled this manually erected 8.5 metre high structure at the quarry in

Pantperthog using traditional frame-raising and gin-pole techniques (2).

There were workshops in parallel set up at CAT led by Musgrove Willow to assemble the intricate woven roofing panels (6, 7). Gabions filled with quarry waste offered stability in the erection process while also marking out the eventual 'gathering' place, the symbolic Gorsedd circle of stones in Trafalgar Square. The structure itself represented the central stone – 'Maen Llog'. Originally, these stone circles were sacred gathering places, blending practical knowledge with spiritual significance – timeless symbols of humanity's connection to nature and the cosmos. Set down in the frantic busyness of tourist central London the messaging was inevitably having to work extra hard to connect.

The primary crafted complex structure was Welsh Douglas fir from forests local to CAT, and Recollective Plywood, a material agency founded by graduates of CAT using waste from the film and TV industry, formed the base for the performance stage below using Studio Bark's U-build system. At the structure's pinnacle (7) the hourglass symbol of Extinction Rebellion



linked the structural arms hovering over a giant Atlas glitter ball (the Titan condemned by Zeus to eternally hold up the sky on his shoulders).

Like all the 'builds' at CAT, the collective joyous learning journey is equally if not more important than the arrival, just as for Deller the moving performance by the collectives that he brings together is the art. The assembly is largely manual, crafted, preserving pre-industrial revolution skills, just as Deller's performative works are so often about the body and touch, and the sheer timeless atmosphere of collective human action at scale. As Dieter Branstatter said of his experience with the project and the student team:

'Life is about story-telling to inspire others, and their journey is worth sharing. I will carry their experience with me for years to come. It has been a magnificent soulful journey.'

It was a great week for Wales in London a fine testament to the thousands of hours of honest labour in a mid-Wales slate quarry.

6



7



TOP SHOW FOR EISTEDDFOD

To the general public, Wrexham may only have registered as a place of national interest in October 2024 as the city's football club gained two Hollywood actors as investors. But for those with an interest in art and architecture, the more important date was April 2018 when Tŷ Pawb, by architect Featherstone Young, officially opened an extraordinary confection of art galleries, market stall-holders and food outlets (see *Touchstone*, 2019, pp. 50–53). From the outset, the indomitable Jo Marsh and her gallery team led an imaginative programme.

In 2025 Marsh and her team stepped forward boldly to curate Y Lle Celf pavilion of the National Eisteddfod Wrecsam.

Since the departure in 2021 of the former arts officer for the Eisteddfod, Robyn Tomos, curating this annual show of arts, craft and architecture has been precarious, and hugely stressful for the annually shifting curators. The quality of the presentation and selection of the work has been very variable.

Presenting architecture to the Eisteddfod-going public in the canvas pavilion alongside art and craft has always been a challenging task for any curator, but Marsh and her team, with special thanks to Adam Netting, have done the best show for a very long time.

There were only two architecture entries, but both being buildings for culture and of award-winning quality they gave the Tŷ Pawb team wonderful material to display.

Sarah Featherstone and Gavin Harris were the architectural selectors, awarding the Nyth project by Manalo White (see pp. 30–32) the Nora Dumphy Gold Medal, and giving the Plaque of Merit to Oriel Plas Glyn-y-Weddw, Llanbedrog by architect Mark Wray working with sculptor Matt Sanderson (*Touchstone*, 2023,

photos of Y Lle Celf Dewi Lloyd



pp. 64–67). Both projects not only provided excellent films showing the processes of their creation, but Netting from Tŷ Pawb had the direct participation of both buildings' clients and designers in curating the still images and the uniquely sculptural and craft objects relevant to each project. They have set a very high benchmark for those to follow, but the Eisteddfod should note the Tŷ Pawb team members are full-time gallery curators and publicly funded. The task is massively time- and budget-consuming.

With the city of Wrexham going full out to be awarded the 2029 City of Culture, this National Eisteddfod showing and the very positive public reaction to it, will offer the city an important feather in its cap. The Eisteddfod's next peripatetic move will be to Llantŵd, Pembrokeshire. Will it find the equivalent of the Tŷ Pawb team?





Uphill ambition

Over fifty years on from what many perceived as the ill-conceived decision to build the Pen-rhys estate on its isolated hilltop site in the Rhondda, there is a new determination for an ambitious regeneration project. Janet Marshall reports.

When the registered social landlord Trivallis and its consultants took their early proposals for creating up to 1,000 new homes at Pen-rhys to the Design Commission for Wales in May 2025, you can sense through reading the polite but probing questions and summary of the design review panel's report an underlying sense of utter disbelief at the notion – Pen-rhys, surely not?

Since 1969, when 951 council homes were completed (to designs by Alex Robertson, Peter Francis and Partners) on the somewhat isolated 24-hectare site on a prominent hilltop location – 1,100 feet above sea level between the Rhondda Fach and Rhondda Fawr valleys, – the media reporting, the TV documentaries, and rumour-mongering over 50 years painted a picture of a supposedly endless bleak social and physical reality. These reports became legendary, some were obviously factual but often showed little understanding of the forces at work. They rarely conveyed anywhere near a full, fair, and balanced record of the residents' experiences. (One exception was Tom Houghton's lengthy Wales Online report on 11 December 2017).

At the outset, like so many post-war council estates, the new homes initially were a godsend to many, climbing out of the bottom of the dark valleys' damp terraces up into the sunlight with spectacular and distant views. There were Parker Morris space standards and a sense of a new start in life. Many of the residents of the 200 homes now remaining on the site – some of whom have been there 56 years – still appreciate some of those qualities and many are very attached to their homes in this startling place. It is said by Trivallis's community engagement team that many who were relocated out of Pen-rhys, or chose to move, would now like to return. Savills, which is advising Trivallis, has market confidence that a whole phalanx of house buyers would jump at the chance for a new home at Pen-rhys.

Out with the old guard

As the first decade passed after Pen-rhys was occupied, Thatcher was then to denigrate all public-sector housing; the irony of right-to-buy, the tenants' recognition of their valued asset didn't quite reach Pen-rhys. The poverty was deep. There



1 The Pen-rhys estate of 951 Parker Morris-standard council houses when completed in 1969, on its prominent hilltop location. Only 200 of those now remain on the site in 2025.

2 Part of the landscape strategy for phase 1A of 121 new homes, leading to the eventual 850 new homes for Pen-rhys. CGI of one of two new north-south major green lungs, handling the 43 metre overall site drop, absorbing gathering opportunities, connecting cross contour paths, offering shared active-travel routes leading down to community and improved commercial facilities and, of course, handling the demanding SuDS requirements.



are now only five private owners at Pen-rhys.

In the bad old days the former old-guard council housing department was frequently offering no other option than Pen-rhys to those suffering the greatest deprivation. Following that punishing of the most deprived you then add poor building and site maintenance, and poor housing management and social services. You then inevitably have the recipe for an unavoidable downward spiral. The spatially inept architecture and urbanism of Pen-rhys – notwithstanding its inclusion as a design example in Abbot and Pollit's *Hill Housing: A Comparative Study* of 1980 – so unsuited to its dramatic hill-side topography and climatic challenges, simply exacerbated the troubles. Add to that a semi-functioning district heating system and it's not hard to see how the architecture became the most visible fall guy – but it was never the full story.

When one community engagement consultant asked in the 1990s to see the council's plan for improving Pen-rhys, a senior housing officer simply opened a drawer and laid out a plan of the site with red crosses on countless dwellings. 'That's my plan', he proudly asserted. So the demolitions and the relocations continued from the original 951 dwellings down eventually to 200 in 2025. That's not a plan but a case of more punishment of the existing residents. Public neglect was their lot – but no longer.

There were earlier false moments of hope. Reported in *Touchstone*, issue 9, Spring 2001, Community Design Services and HACAS Consulting were working with the Communities First partnership at Pen-rhys offering a master plan, but like other master plans that followed, they never came to anything because despite their genuine community engagement they never got their financial ducks in a row. The business plan never added up. There were simply promises that could never be delivered. Inevitably a community becomes sceptical of these incoming consultants.

Not surprisingly in 2008 the housing tenants of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) voted to move under the wing of a new registered social landlord, Trivallis. Surely things would improve? There was initially little sign of it at Pen-rhys. Trivallis was placed under review by the Welsh regulator in April 2022.

New brooms

In May 2022 Trivallis appointed a new director, the former and well-respected Bron Afon housing association lead, Duncan Forbes. Other new blood joined the Trivallis team: Louise Attwood came from housing association Linc Cymru to be corporate director development in June 2024. The community engagement team was given new blood. The Urbanists, as urban designers and

Original site plan of the Pen-rhys estate showing the volume of demolitions by 2024



New site plan for Pen-rhys (still evolving) highlighting phase 1A.



landscape consultants, was hired in the summer of 2024 to work alongside the community, listening intently to scope a master plan. Things were beginning to now move at pace.

The pressure during Covid had also been on RCTCBC’s planners. A revised local development plan was required to find ‘candidate sites’ for urgently needed new housing in the county borough. The Trivallis-owned, 24-hectare Pen-rhys site looked like one of the only serious options for a sizeable addition to the authority’s housing stock. In RCTCBC’s *Revised Local Development Plan April 2022 – April 2027: Preferred Strategy* (January 2024) Pen-rhys is identified as one of the potential key sites for housing delivery.

Demolitions over decades of 75% of Pen-rhys’s homes have created havoc on the site, wrecking servicing infrastructure and offering fine opportunities for rat infestation, generating a further sense of desolation. The only shop on site has closed, as has the doctors’ surgery. The church, in contrast, has long been a centre for everything communal, its religious leaders hugely active, much loved and respected. The primary school and the children’s centre the same.

Since autumn 2024 there has been an intense programme of monthly meetings between residents, Trivallis’s community engagement and development staff, The Urbanists, and architect Stride Treglown. The site’s former architectural and spatial failures have been laid bare in their September 2025 pre-application consultation (PAC) submission for a phase 1A of 121 homes. (The 850 new homes envisaged are to be built in seven phases – a portion of the existing residents will move in stages into the new phase 1A homes.)

Radical surgery is required. At the moment, it is envisaged that eventually all the existing homes will be demolished and replaced by high-performing, environmentally sound house types out of the Tai ar y Cyd pattern book launched in January 2025, which Rob Wheaton of Stride Treglown developed with the Welsh Government’s Steve Cranston working with 23 other RSLs in Wales. Inevitably there will have to be adjustments in the pattern-book homes to fit the tricky topography, the close-to-the-surface bedrock, and the distinct spatial patterns of the master plan’s active travel movement developed so far.

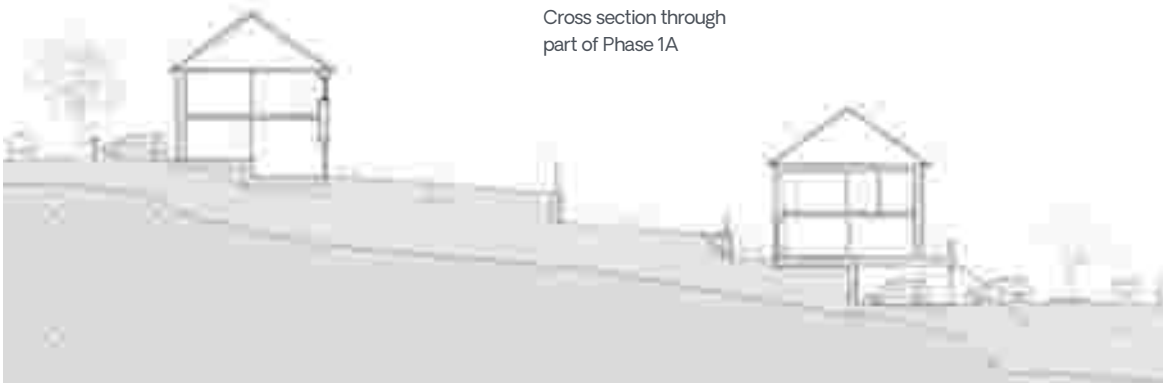
Through these community meetings a layered analysis has been searching for a distinct spatial resolution; it had to embrace the residents’ pride in their place and the strength of the community, while encompassing what they value most: movement within the site had to be straightforwardly well connected; a patchwork of biodiversity and SuDS landscaping needed to work with those connections; there needed



New green infrastructure



New social and play infrastructure; (subject to revision)



Cross section through part of Phase 1A

Phase 1A: Distribution of house types

The unit distribution across Phase 1A is predominantly housing, varying in two- to three-bedroom houses. There is an apartment block providing 1 and 2 bedroom apartments.



Phase 1A: Parking types and distribution

Balancing parking with design and site layout is important, therefore the proposal offers a range of parking types: garage, on-plot and off-plot.



Phase 1A: Proposed site plan



to be a spatial form that offers easy sociability and safety; routes with gathering places and play spaces for different age groups, overseen by residences; it must draw in the quality of the surrounding landscape and, above, all tackle the striking topography of Pen-rhys – a 43 metre drop from north to south – and the site's severe exposure to everything a changing climate can throw at it.

In a broad brush the master plan so far seems remarkably simple: two and three storey terraces and cross-connecting paths and road access run along the east-west contours, the roads filtering in from the existing perimeter main access road. Running north-south are two major green lungs absorbing all those gathering opportunities, offering shared active-travel routes leading down to the community, and, hopefully, improved commercial facilities on the site; and of course handling the demanding SuDS requirements. Some residences are turned north-south to overlook the green lungs. The devil, of course, will be in the detail (see p. 13 for full site plan).

Determined ambition

Inevitably many notes on aspects of the master plan in the PAC submission say 'subject to revision'. There are many community tensions between habitual expectations, years of memories, sometimes simply an understandable fear of change, and an inevitable scepticism about speed of delivery – and this all rubs up against the absolute imperative to ensure that the business plan stacks up, that, for example, a much needed on-site retail store, will believe that the site they are offered will work commercially. It is in everyone's interests, existing and new residents, that there are no more closures, demolitions, losses of hope. There is too much at stake.

There is much imaginative energy being applied into potential training skills for younger family members that could piggy-back on various aspects of the development. The master plan currently aims for 35% social rent, the remainder being various form of home ownership. Development partners are being courted. The ambition of Trivallis and its consultants is very determined. Many of the existing residents feel and share in that determination. Duncan Forbes describes them as one of the strongest and most cohesive and energetic communities he has met in his 20 years of RSL experience in the valleys. There can be no accusation of neglect anymore. It's bound to be a bumpy ride but this could be Pen-rhys's moment to defy all the naysayers and shine on the hill.

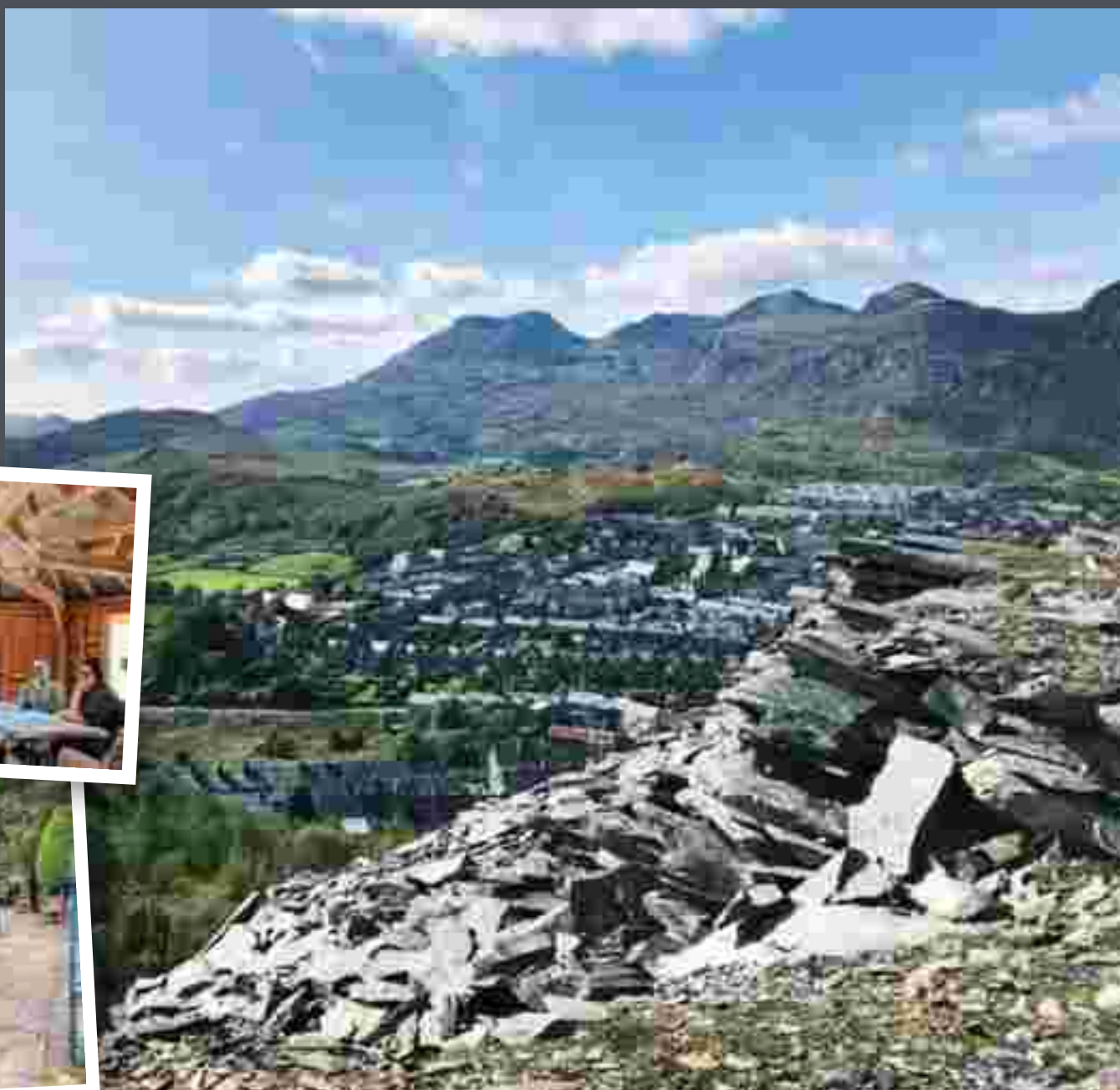
Janet Marshall is an architectural journalist and regular contributor to Touchstone.

Saving spaces for communities: *engaging with the well-being economy*

The well-being economy in Wales has been described as a vision of 'a different type of economy ... which foregrounds the wellbeing of people, planet and places'.¹ How should architects articulate their role in it, leading up to the Senedd elections in 2026? **Clare Melhuish** reports on two distinct initiatives in Gwynedd, which provide different insights into this question.



Right and below: Blaenau Ffestiniog, Gwynedd. Cwmni Bro a community-led group of residents has been modelling an approach to sustainable, socially responsible prosperity and well-being for well over 20 years, setting an example of integrated community development for Wales and beyond. Gwenlli Evans, below, is Cwmni Bro's communication and participation worker





Right and below: the Nyth project created in a converted church for Frân Wen, the Welsh-language theatre company in Bangor, Gwynedd. An intense collaborative user-led design process. Below, young users and architects from Manalo & White in one of their early on-site meetings



Kristina Banholzer

Since the ‘world-first’² *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act* was passed into law in 2015, the concept of economic well-being has been tied to a legal framework, and the nation’s progress towards well-being is assessed annually. But, according to the 2025 report from the Institute of Welsh Affairs (IWA) and Oxfam Cymru ‘the practical policies for how to support [the well-being economy] in a Welsh context, with all the unique challenges and opportunities this brings, still appears out of reach’; it therefore aims to provide ‘a practical manifesto of policies to lead into the Senedd 2026 elections’.³

None of the 50 indicators used by the government to assess and report on the nation’s progress towards the seven well-being goals⁴ specifically refers to the quality of the built environment in relation to well-being. Ten of the indicators might be indirectly linked to the work of architects in the following areas: access to services and facilities; feeling safe in an area; satisfaction with the local area as a place to live; a sense of belonging to an area, along with housing provision and affordability; housing energy performance and flood resilience; and participation in arts, culture

or heritage activities. However, they fall short of recognising the role that the architectural profession can play in improving the quality of life and well-being for communities, given the right opportunities and resources.

The key proposals of the IWA and Oxfam Cymru report include a socially-just transition to net zero via a national wealth fund, and the provision of tools to enable socially responsible businesses to thrive, via a community empowerment act. These are concepts with which architects need to engage, in order to advance the role of the architectural profession in providing the spatial and material infrastructure required to anchor networked social and economic infrastructure in place. The two case studies presented here, one comprising a network of rural settlements, and one a distinct building in an urban context, provide insights into the value of the role that architects can play in fostering thriving communities sustained by attachment to place and local identity. However, both cases also highlight that this may demand a more visually modest architectural language and less extractive approach to material resources, while also redefining which sectors of society architectural service should prioritise.

‘None of the 50 indicators used by the government to assess and report on the nation’s progress towards the seven well-being goals specifically refers to the quality of the built environment in relation to well-being.’

Case study 1

Cymni Bro Ffestiniog: *building community without architects*

Cwmni Bro has been modelling an approach to sustainable, socially responsible prosperity and well-being for years, even before the community was identified among the 100 most deprived wards in Wales in 2008 (of which seven were located in Gwynedd) by the Welsh Government's Communities First programme. Funding from the programme, which provided assistance with partnership-based projects, established the Blaenau Communities First Company. In 2012, the programme was terminated in the Bro Ffestiniog area, but the local community rallied to continue the activities of the company under a new name, and pursue its vision to 'set an example of integrated community development which can be emulated by other communities in Wales and beyond'.⁵

To a great extent, this was nothing new for a historically cohesive and tight-knit community, which grew up around the slate industry from 1818 with the establishment of the Oakley Slate Quarries, followed by the Llechwedd quarry in 1849. The *caban* was a local workers' institution underground that has been 'likened to an *eisteddfod*, a friendly society and a trade union all rolled into one'⁶ providing a wide range of social activities. Today Cwmni Bro refers to 'the old cultural tradition of community enterprise, in other words the community doing things for itself',⁷ and the community's responsibility for building on that.

Cadw's 2011 urban character analysis of the town underscored how that was reflected in the historic material environment, concluding that:

'Its short chronology of development has given Blaenau Ffestiniog an unusual coherence... Cultural and economic aspiration is displayed in the architectural variety of its commercial buildings, and in the ambition of its schools and chapels. By contrast, the housing stock seems remarkably uniform, until a series of subtle distinctions is recognized'.⁸

But today, the old market hall is just one of a number of substantial buildings built to support the town's thriving economic and social infrastructure in the mid-19th century, which stand unused and dilapidated.

Cadw's report was produced to support emerging regeneration proposals for the town centre area adjoining the railway station. Led by Gwynedd Council's regeneration team it was

'centred on putting Blaenau Ffestiniog back on the map, and ensuring that the town is a great place to live and to visit'. The strategy included 'creating a suitable environment to support local businesses' – upgraded shopfronts, toilets, and a marketing campaign called 'From the Rock' – and developing 'sustainable future growth and investment'.⁹ Gwynedd also led on the campaign to secure UNESCO World Heritage Site status for the Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales, which, alongside EU rural development funding, partly supported the arts-led high street regeneration celebrating the town's heritage, including an 'iconic stacked-slate gateway to the town'.¹⁰

Extractive industries

However, the partnership that secured the money to regenerate the town to the tune of £4.5 million was actually facilitated by a credit union facility established by the original Communities First company, in response to the desertion of Blaenau's High Street by the high street banks. This constituted a vital enabling element of social infrastructure allowing the town's aesthetic regeneration by landscape architect Macgregor Smith and public artist Howard Bowcott to be realised. Gwenlli Evans, Cwmni Bro's communication and participation worker (gweithiwr cyfathrebu a cyfranogi) explains the landscaping work may have contributed to a 'rise in confidence' locally, however it doesn't compensate for the continuing loss of services and essential social infrastructure out of Blaenau. Empty iconic buildings (2) are still falling into dilapidation as a result, and there is no guarantee of housing affordability for locals in an economic development framework focused on tourism.

I met Gwenlli, who seemed to know

everyone we met, in the town centre's old tourist information centre opened by Eryri (Snowdonia) National Park in 1981, only to be closed down later along with others in the region. It now operates as a vibrant social enterprise café in the Cwmni Bro network (1, 3), for the benefit of the local community. This tale seems a tellingly symbolic opener to our conversation about the extractive force of tourism following in the footsteps of previous industries.

Since the demise of slate production by the mid-20th century, the Oakley and Lechwedd quarries have been turned respectively into a museum (Gloddfa Ganol, 1974, now closed), and Slate Caverns attraction (since 1972) with an adventure sports site (mountain biking, underground trampolines, and zip-wires), aimed at attracting tourists visiting north Wales. The opening of the station at Blaenau Ffestiniog on the restored Ffestiniog heritage railway in 1982, made a further significant contribution to the development of tourism. The expansion of the zip-wire commercial franchise in the area, supported by a £6.2 million public funding grant awarded in 2025 on the basis of its contribution to job creation, regional spend by visitors, and an eBus service, has been strongly contested, both locally and by Foundational Economy Research.¹¹ It has a 'poor record of engaging with local communities'¹² and as Evans says, it's just another

'... it's just another example of the evolution of extractive industry, from slate, to energy, water, and tourism, which Cwmni Bro is challenging with its work to "keep community benefit in town".'



Claire Melhuish

‘Since only five responses mention the quality of the town centre as a factor, the emphasis on architectural and environmental attractiveness seems to be less significant for locals with longer and deeper associations to the area, than it has been for ‘marketing’ the area for tourism, contributing to the rise in Airbnb lettings.’

example of the evolution of extractive industry, from slate, to energy, water, and tourism, which Cwmni Bro is challenging with its work to ‘keep community benefit in town’.

This includes supporting quality of employment in local social enterprises, as well as investing funding in the purchase of local buildings for their use. Cwmni Bro now coordinates a network of 20 social enterprises in the town, wider Bro Ffestiniog area, and Gwynedd, including some founded back in the 1990s. They range from a Welsh language opera company (Opra Cymru), to a care company (Seren), pubs, a community welfare centre (Y Dref Werdd), the café (Tŷ Coffi, Antur Stiniog coffee house), which thrives in the old tourist centre, and the Green Town initiative, employing 150 people between them, and making Cymni Bro one of the primary employers in the area.

All of these rely on the town’s built infrastructure resources for their existence, yet without significant evidence of professional architectural support. One of the earliest enterprises set up in 2008 was Antur Stiniog, the successful local mountain biking business initially funded by the partnership that secured the money to regenerate the town. But Antur Stiniog has subsequently been able to invest its profits in the purchase and community ownership of buildings in the town to house other and new enterprises in the network, most recently two run-down buildings at 22–23 Church Street, one of which will be converted into accommodation for less able people.

Community infrastructure not posh offices

In contrast to post-industrial towns in the south Wales valleys, and for various reasons, transfers

of assets of community value to community ownership have not been significant in this area. However, physical spaces in good repair are important as much for supporting the continuing development of community-led social enterprise as they are for raising confidence and strengthening continuity of attachment to the local area through their heritage value. ‘Saving spaces’ (as Evans puts it) for the community has depended on reinvesting grant funds or loans in purchasing dilapidated empty buildings and investing in the historic built fabric of the town.

Other factors also play a critical role though in supporting what appears to be a successful model of a ‘well-being economy’ positively benefiting the local community, compared to tourism’s average spend of 23p per person in the town that Evans quotes. Crucially, they include capacity-building to promote the participation of the next generation, both through renovation of a space specifically for young people, and through establishment of BROcast Ffestiniog, a digital community broadcasting service launched at the end of July 2018, aiming to train and encourage young people to create their own content and enhance community participation, communication and awareness of the work of the network.

‘... it’s clear that this is unlikely to be spent on expensive capital projects, like “posh offices”. Rather, it will be invested in more full-time staff, and building partnerships, including with academic researchers...’

Cwmni Bro, in a partnership with Partneriaeth Ogwen and Siop Griffiths, is currently aiming to bid to the Growth Deal for North Wales, signed in 2020 (£1 billion to the region over 15 years until 2036), for funding which it aims to invest in its further development and what Evans references as *cymunedoli* or ‘communitisation’ (quoting Selwyn Williams, secretary of Cwmni Bro) of wealth and resources. But it’s clear that this is unlikely to be spent on expensive capital projects, like ‘posh offices’.¹³ Rather, it will be invested in more full-time staff, and building partnerships, including with academic researchers, such as the team from Foundational Economy Research (FER) led by Professor Karel Williams. FER produced a report challenging the idea of Blaenau Ffestiniog as a ‘deprived’ or ‘left-behind’ place, based on a survey of 150 (mostly young and ‘better educated’) respondents who had chosen to ‘stay behind’. As the authors concluded, it demonstrates ‘the importance of attachment to place for those who could leave but chose to stay’.¹⁴

The choice to ‘stay behind’

Notably, the findings of this survey do not explicitly link such attachment with the quality of the built or designed environment per se. The three types of place in the area that made respondents ‘feel good’, were identified as: first, (45 responses) industrial and ex-industrial sites (quarries, reservoir, dams); second, ‘places of urban sociability’ including (cafés (22), pubs (10) and ‘town centre’ (just 5, out of 37 responses in total); and third (close behind at 35 responses), natural environment locations (lakes, mountains, forest and walks). Since only five responses mention the quality of the town centre as a factor, the emphasis on architectural and environmental attractiveness seems to be less significant for locals with longer and deeper associations to the area than it has been for ‘marketing’ the area for tourism, contributing to the rise in Airbnb lettings. Residents’ three main reasons for leaving Blaenau Ffestiniog included not being able to find work, housing or social infrastructure there. Clearly, place-based social and spatial infrastructure must be considered hand-in-hand, if the architectural profession in Wales is to promote its relevance to the well-being of communities and community-based economies across the country more actively. The next case study provides an example of an impressive success story in this context. It highlights the role that architectural expertise and design quality can play in promoting the well-being economy, beyond the limited scope of the government’s current eight indicators related to quality and services in local areas.

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Claire Melhuish

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Claire Melhuish

Case study 2

Frân Wen's Nyth project, Bangor:

people taking over buildings and ideas

Insights from the Bro Ffestiniog story are echoed to some extent in the context of Frân Wen's Nyth ('Nest') project in Bangor, opened in 2022, but point to somewhat different conclusions regarding the value of architects and architecture in the Welsh well-being economy.

This church conversion for a Welsh-language theatre company has been a runaway architectural success story, garnering several awards (RSAW 2025, the Dewi-Prys Thomas Award 2025; and the Nora Dunphy Gold Medal for Architecture at the National Eisteddfod of Wales 2025 – see pp. 30–32). The architect, Manalo & White, based in London, is naturally delighted by its success, but Frân Wen's executive director, Nia Jones, who has spent a lot of time showing round visiting assessors and preparing an exhibition on the project for the National Eisteddfod in Wrexham (see p.11), also emphasises that the building's adaptive redesign has been a huge community success; indeed this has been recognised in the architectural awards.

Jones stresses that the building has not been designed as a 'venue' per se, but as an arts, culture and community hub that is 'all about process and co-creation ... working with community and enabling representation ... giving young people confidence to carry on in life. It has always just been a project in our artistic programme'. Yet she is clear that the production of *Olion*, the company's first big project in Bangor involving over 100 artists, could not have been achieved without the building: a 'nest' for the company that has been carefully designed to take its needs for accessibility, flexibility, and comfort in mind, within a rather rigid and monumental pre-existing structure. Furthermore, the success of Nyth as an architectural story may ultimately have a positive knock-on effect on the profile of the company, which, she says, has struggled to attract theatre reviewers from Cardiff to come to north Wales to see the work, despite its 40-year history of local production combined with national and international collaboration and touring (for example, its recent contribution to Jeremy Deller's *Triumph of Art* production for the National Gallery in London (see p. 10).



There are interesting parallels between Frân Wen and Cwmni Bro, specifically their roles in sustaining and reproducing local and networked social infrastructure in Gwynedd, and their commitment to modelling a different approach to local economic well-being based on social enterprise, in contrast to the conventional GDP-centred model of economic growth. Indeed, the two organisations have worked together, within the wider context of what Nia describes as a more recent 'surge in taking over buildings and ideas' by local people and organisations in Wales.

Designing for radical inclusivity

The story of Nyth starts with the closure of the church of St Mary by the Church in Wales in 2011. It represented the heart of the local community with a key role in bringing people together. After Nia found the building for sale for £150,000 on Rightmove, Frân Wen bought it in August 2019 with Arts Council of Wales funding, following eight years of increasing anti-social behaviour on the site around the empty church, which was fuelling community concerns about its future. A major fund-raising exercise (£3 million) was launched to convert it into an international arts centre that would also preserve the building as an integral part of the community to which it belongs.

The project architect, Takuya Oura, describes the project as an approach to shaping a form of 'radical inclusivity'. Not only is social engagement

and accessibility¹⁵ core to the programme, but it's also youth-driven, and Frân Wen's Young Company of 100 members played a critical role in generating the ideas brought to the project, meeting with Takuya every month from the start.

While the building was still empty, Frân Wen introduced an artistic response to it, establishing a relationship with the local community. But owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, the majority of the design process had to unfold remotely on Zoom, bringing together in virtual space the London-based architects with a locally based team of heritage and landscape experts that they appointed, and the Young Company.

Nia maintains that Takuya's willingness to fully embed himself in the work of the company, notwithstanding these constraints, and develop a holistic understanding of the company's identity and needs, informed the way the project took shape and provided the basis for its success. She explains how this was manifested in the evolution of Takuya's presentations, from a more technical and architectural focus on the building itself at the beginning, shifting to one that foregrounded the activities of the company and its ambitious social outreach programme, and the building as a home for this work. This includes a pop-up company in the summer holidays, a creative health and well-being programme trialling social prescription approaches, and an artists' development programme, which commissioned

'Jones stresses that the building has not been designed as a "venue" per se, but as an arts, culture and community hub that is "all about process and co-creation ... working with community and enabling representation ... giving young people confidence to carry on in life".'

333 freelance artists last year to work with the small core staff of seven in the creation of accessible work in the Welsh language.

Frân Wen works with institutional partners including various departments of Bangor University, and across the areas of Gwynedd, Ynys Môn and Conwy in north Wales, making the city a strategic location for its operation. But it also travels its productions throughout Wales and abroad, and keeps 20% of its schedule free for visiting artists to take advantage of the space and resources Nyth now provides in Bangor.

Navigating a vision

According to Takuya and his colleague Brian Greathead, director at Manalo & White, the reason the building has won so many awards is four-fold: first, Gethin Evans (creative director) and Nia sustained and communicated a strong vision of what Frân Wen could be while navigating a complex political situation; second, the church remains a church, albeit with a powerful and attractive new accessible entrance front (1–3) converted from the undercroft, on axis with the main road; third, the company is very much part of the community; and fourth, the architect has played a successful role in navigating its various needs to produce a home of architectural quality that works flexibly for everyone who uses it. For a church conversion, this is quite an achievement. According to Jones its success can be gauged by the fact that ‘no-one’s been intimidated by the space’, despite its scale, monumental materials and roots in religious doctrine – and this is in contrast to the shiny,

new Pontio Art and Innovation Centre in Bangor that is, comparatively, said to be struggling to engage with young people, and, moreover, during an unusual summer of non-stop sunshine, has become too hot to work in.

On a very warm August day, after a long hot drive, stepping inside Nyth was a soothing experience, while the sight of school children enjoying some of their summer holiday time on a project in the calm and spacious surrounds of the former nave, columns still intact, was an uplifting reminder of what architectural expertise can produce for local communities, especially those short on resources. It highlighted the possibilities that can be realised by architects working closely with local organisations, in places where money, time, and space might be lacking, but attachment to locality, desire to stay, and aspirations for the future are strong. Phase 2 of this project, bringing that future more closely into view, is already in hand, focusing on development of the site around the church with ‘pod’ accommodation for visiting artists combined with community uses.

Architectural manifesto for the well-being economy

Right across Wales, community initiative provides a huge source of potential to reshape post-industrial histories and reclaim narratives about identity and belonging from the ground upwards, by reshaping places to ‘keep community benefit in town’ and enhance, rather than denude, local environments. This means accepting that ‘stand-out’, high-fee architectural projects may not be the appropriate solution to local needs, compared to low-key, low-fee, sustainable and community-centered initiatives to save spaces for meaningful, radically inclusive local use. Nevertheless, a fresh manifesto for supporting the development of the well-being economy in the run-up to the 2026 Senedd election should both recognise more explicitly and attach resources to the value of architects’ expertise in saving and shaping local built environments that sustain attachment to place and local quality of life, while supporting spaces for economic opportunity and viable social infrastructure; holding on to existing uses and communities as well as attracting new ones.

Clare Melhuish was formerly an architecture critic, and is currently Professorial Research Fellow in Anthropology of Built Environments at UCL Urban Laboratory, working with the Welsh School of Architecture at Cardiff University on research collaborations in Wales.

‘There are interesting parallels between Frân Wen and Cwmni Bro ... their commitment to modelling a different approach to local economic well-being based on social enterprise, in contrast to the conventional GDP-centered model of economic growth.’

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A FAT CHANCE?

As the former Welsh minister for housing and local government, Julie James, noted at the 1 April 2023 announcement on the Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan:

‘The challenges that can be caused by high levels of second home and short-term let ownership are complex, and there is no quick fix solution. The wide range of measures we have introduced – across tax, planning, empty homes and our commitment to statutory licensing – are unequalled as a package in a UK context. It is a reflection of our commitment to help people live affordably in their local communities.’

One of the measures was termed the ‘fair chance scheme’. Home sellers could choose not only to ensure that sales information was bilingual, but they could elect to put a time limit on when sales could be offered only to people living locally.

One of the earliest new build schemes to trumpet the voluntary signing up to this scheme was Evermôr’s Longshore development of 15 homes in a totally stunning location overlooking a woodland to the beach at Aberporth, developed and built by Jones Brothers (Henllan) of Llanelli (1).

According to online information three of the 15 homes ‘were sold to local key workers within the affordable market’, whatever that means, and the remaining 12 were ‘offered to local buyers, bilingually, for a fixed period of six months’. The developer claims that ‘50% of the homes were sold to local people and those with local connections’, a term capable of wide interpretation.

The four-bedroom homes, each with two bathrooms, air-source heat pumps, and a cold shower in the garden (2) are on Savills’ website (not



bilingually) for guide prices of between £545,000 and £575,000; prices are also set in dollars.

There is a sizeable old woodland between the development and the beach. This woodland and the landscaped public realm are to be ‘placed into a management company controlled by the residents and subject to a first-year service charge of £500. Residents are to then agree annual maintenance and landscaping upkeep charges’. With the remaining woodland being the only visual barrier between the homes and the beach (3), even though living spaces are inverted to the first floor, what are the odds-on chance of the woodland’s survival?

The development in its spatial layout owes nothing to the settlement patterns of Aberporth.

The development uprooted the old earthen hedge-bank that fronted Ffordd Newydd lane. The extensive tarmacked surface for substantial car parking and the multiple accesses off the lane defeat any chance for more intimate gestures of domestic enclosure.

There is presently, according to Savills, ‘a restricted [sic] covenant that prevents the property use for commercial rental or holiday letting. Private and personal vacation use is not affected’.

The Welsh Government should really check this scheme out in detail to ascertain whether there is, or is not, a fat chance of locals most in need, accessing this development promoted under the fair chance scheme.





ARE WE JUST RESIGNED?



4

As Lady Bracknell pronounced in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* 'to lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness'.

The same might be pondered in the unfolding drama around Cardiff Council's planning department and its heritage and conservation officers. Their most senior and longest serving officer left in January 2025, followed by his close colleague in June. Finally, the remaining officer who had the ability to comment on heritage matters left later in July. Why did they all leave so quickly and in such short succession? To lose three in such a short period of time cannot surely be put down to an

unfortunate set of coincidences.

In any historic city there are inevitably constant and often difficult-to-resolve tensions between pressures for development on the one hand, and the need to protect conservation areas on the other. Those fronting the planning process in their presentations to members will talk of finding the right balance between these sometimes seemingly irresolvable conflicts of interest, but for planning committee members to act responsibly they must be able to hear their chief planning officer's recommendation but also check it against the qualified heritage officer's independent professional advice. The balancing must be a fully transparent process so that those elected to make a decision have all the information they need, while an interested wider public can also follow the process.

There have been a whole series of developments over the last decade in and around the edges of Cardiff's city centre conservation areas – the Centre for Student Life on Park Place (1), the Wood Street bus station apartment tower (2), the Premier Inn south of St Mary Street (4), Bradley Court on the corner of the Boulevard de Nantes and Park Place (6), the tower on Guildford Crescent (5), the Bridge Street Exchange tower, the development on the site of Landore Court on Charles Street (3), as well as the scheme for the redevelopment of Howell's department store site (7). Looking at all these might suggest the balance has tipped too far; and now the mother of all towers, the Blue Castle Capital 180 metre-high proposal of 50 storeys adjacent to the Principality Stadium (8) simply offers yet more fuel for those arguing for over-development within the conservation areas themselves.

Has the regular backing of such schemes, and an alleged suppression or editing of heritage officer comments, resulted in the heritage officers jumping ship?

Maybe senior officers and politicians love to have multiple high-rise tower cranes on the skyline of the city centre. Paid for by remote investors it is an indicator of economic resilience, even if the blocks are bland and merely homes for students and young adults who themselves may lack the money to buy a better home elsewhere. So much for sustainable development and social justice as well.

Such schemes emerge from viability arguments: we must build tall to pay for the site. Others might argue that such demands for scale come only from remote funders looking for a high return, while such viability arguments are also a concoction created by high land values inflated by the very generosity of the planning department in supporting the big scheme originally. Aren't these the processes that our planning system was established to resist and manage in the interests of the rest of us? Either way it's a self-reinforcing and reaffirming process. All we will see is a preponderance of overlarge buildings overshadowing dull streets and spaces, while as a result of stretched viability they themselves create, development elsewhere will merely dry up.

Touchstone will be pursuing this in more depth for its 2026 issue.



touchstones



A VERY CIVIL SERVANT

Richard Wilson is a rare breed – a top civil servant in the Welsh Government who one could truly call a patron of architecture. Without Richard's charm, expertise and skilful diplomacy over many years, we would probably not have the outstanding Senedd building that sits in Cardiff Bay.

At the Constructing Excellence Wales (CEW) awards event held at the Celtic Manor conference centre 20 June 2025, which also marked Wilson's retirement from being a civil

'... someone whose entire career has been defined by integrity, vision, relationships, and an unwavering commitment to public service.'

servant and the longest serving chair of CEW, the built environment industry of Wales offered huge applause and a special award for Wilson's remarkable contribution.

Rebecca Evans MS, the Welsh Government's cabinet secretary for economy, energy and planning, led the tributes:

'It is my great privilege to pay tribute to a truly exceptional individual – someone whose entire career has been defined by integrity, vision, relationships, and an unwavering commitment to public service.

'More than just a senior civil servant, he has been a pillar of Wales's built environment, shaping the landscape of our nation through over 50 years of distinguished service.

'His leadership has shaped skylines, inspired teams, and left a lasting mark on communities across Wales.

'From leading some of the most iconic construction and infrastructure projects in our history to mentoring generations of professionals, his impact is both profound and enduring. One of the crowning moments of his career came in 2006, when the design and construction teams, along with National Assembly staff, gathered in the Oriel to present the newly completed Senedd building to members of the Royal Family. It was Mr Wilson, as the National Assembly's project manager, who had the honour of explaining the project's journey to Her Majesty the Queen – a moment that captured the significance of his work and the respect he commands.'

Touchstone salutes you too Richard. Thank you for your leadership.

A SEAT AT THE BIG BOY'S AND GIRL'S TABLE

A rare moment in UK architectural history occurred last August following the completion of work by the 30-or-so strong RIBA awards panel. The panel decides on RIBA national awards after assessing the regional submissions and also puts forward the shortlist for the Stirling prize. When applicable the panel also selects international schemes for awards.

I expect you thought I was going to write that Wales, at last, after years of an awards desert from the RIBA, actually gained an RIBA national award? But sadly no, despite considering the multi-award winning Nyth project by Manalo & White (p. 30) and Hall + Bednarczyk's fine architecture at Croes Fach.

More significant, however, was the fact that Wales's only ever invited member to join that august panel at 66 Portland Place finally decided, after three years of dedicated service, that despite really enjoying the experience, it was massively costly in terms of time, energy and impact on his small practice, so he had to step down.

Yes, it was exhausting and hugely time consuming if one took the role seriously; there's no payment apart from expenses and you need to be always in the room to fully command respect. You are not there necessarily to argue for Wales, although you will be keen to learn how Welsh submissions will be treated.



NEWPORT: IN ANOTHER LEAGUE

'Constructing Excellence in Wales (CEW) is the united voice of the Welsh built environment sector, representing each part of its supply chain'. It is there, it claims, 'to help the industry to improve its performance to deliver better quality and value for money to its clients and end users' and to focus on 'all aspects of sustainability, including economic, social and environmental, demonstrating that the scheme is well rounded and has incorporated best practice and collaboration'.

The scale of its annual awards ceremony in glitz, number of awards, table and ticket booking prices, and number of networking professionals present, inevitably far outshines any of Wales's other built environmental award ceremonies. The word 'architecture' appears nowhere in its press releases or judgement criteria. It's really about delivery and, potentially, politics.

So, in a shortlist run-off for CEW's Building Project of the Year 2025 between the beautifully crafted Severn View Park residential care home for residents with dementia by Pentan Architects

(*Touchstone*, 2024, pp. 36–39) and Corstorphine and Wright's 237,000 sq ft semi-conductor R&D and manufacturing centre at Ringlands Way, Newport for the Californian head-quartered company, KLA, it was almost inevitable that KLA's facility should come out tops. Its products, KLA claims, 'go into almost every smartphone in the world but are also used to power wind farms, enable smart and electric vehicles, and provide always-on connectivity with Bluetooth, Wi-Fi and mobile communications, to mention a few'. In economy driving, this is big time.

As Will Hayward, the excellent Welsh journalist noted in one of his weekly newsletters, we may not have all woken up fully to Wales's silicon plain, namely Newport City, so that besides KLA's substantial presence there will be the £2.5 billion Microsoft construction of two large, state-of-the-art data centre units adjacent to KLA in Newport; also, there is Vantage Data – a leading data hub in Imperial Park siting its HQ for UK operations also in Newport. Add to that Airbus – where their

Newport site plays a key role in the company's operations specialising in secure connectivity, cyber solutions, and infrastructure protection for the UK – and then add the £16-million flagship Porsche dealership moving from Cardiff to Newport, which opened last year, and CAF Rail investing £30 million in a new factory at Celtic Business Park in Llanwern, Newport, creating up to 300 new jobs manufacturing high-speed trains, both diesel, electric and light-rail trams: It seems it's all happening at Newport.

But Hayward has other vital statistics for us on Newport:

'it has the highest percentage of under 15s anywhere in Cymru – 19% ... Between 2011 and 2021 the under 16 population of Newport grew at 10.2%; the closest to that was Cardiff at just over 5% ... Newport was the fastest growing local authority in Wales since 2011 at 9.5%'.

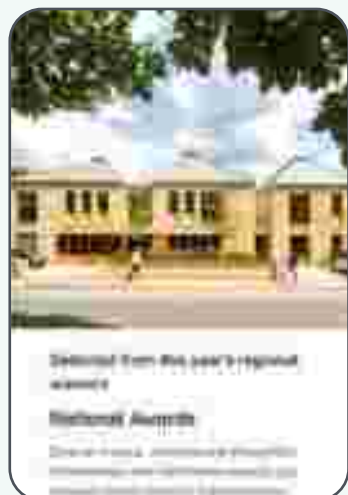
But then comes the difficult stuff. Hayward notes:

'It might surprise you to read that Newport now has the fastest rising rents in Great Britain. Not in Wales. In Britain. Over a 12 month period, rents in Newport have gone up an astonishing 21% ... we are bestowing onto our next generations rent rises of over a fifth every year.'

This is not a recipe for prosperity, however much the tech economy explodes around Newport; and then Hayward adds:

'Of Wales's 22 local authorities, Newport is 5th highest when it comes to child poverty. (In second place is Merthyr, the other part of Wales with the highest amount of young people) ... If we look at rates of poverty on a hyper-local level, Pillgwenlly and Docks, Newport is at 49%, one of the three places with highest level of child poverty in Wales.'

Up in the Celtic Manor Resort the CEW 'family' may be celebrating 'delivery', but can those yawning gulfs between capitalism's latest growth spurts and the realities of life lived ever be resolved? That may have little to do with architecture either.



Those who know Chris Loyn will not be surprised to hear he was a tenacious and vocal participant in that awards process, never afraid to confront inconsistencies, battling for those core qualities that he has demonstrated throughout his practice's work. He acknowledges that he learnt so much from listening to the other architects, debating the pros and cons of the submissions, seeing the projects in the flesh and struggling to balance and compare one scheme against another. The whole process really underlined for him just how incredibly hard it was to compare different pieces of high-quality architecture in different locations and for different clients,

while understanding and taking into account the varying constraints and opportunities presented in the various regions around the country.

Many members of that panel, certainly from the other regions, were sorry to see him step down. As one of them wrote:

'I am so sorry to see you stepping down from our jury. (Hopefully, there are no more to follow for now)! I echo all the others comments about the pleasure and privilege (and ongoing education!) it is to spend such quality time together considering what makes great architecture. We'll miss you.'

How long will it be before another architect from Wales is invited to that high table?

Not by bread alone

'Left behind' is a familiar emotional refrain heard throughout the valleys of south Wales; so much has been brutally removed. But worse than that there has for a long time been a glaring black hole in its former capital, Merthyr Tydfil. **Geraint Talfan Davies**, chair of The Cyfarthfa Foundation, argues that it's time for another 'Rising', this time, to give it back its cultural heart.

One of the dangers of decades of economic retrenchment is the spread of pessimism with its stultifying effect on the imagination. So overwhelming do our core problems seem – health, education, the high incidence and myriad effects of poverty – that everything else is made to seem a luxury, not least cultural investment. That is something that is felt all the more keenly in Wales, where the Welsh Government's overall budget is so much more constrained than that enjoyed by the governments of Scotland and Northern Ireland, let alone England.

But, even in periods of pervading gloom, a coincidence of events can create opportunities that are too substantial to be ignored. This is the case at Merthyr Tydfil where the completion of

the dualling of the Heads of the Valleys Road and the arrival of the new Metro rail service have underlined twice over the scale of opportunity that lies at their crossroads: specifically, at Cyfarthfa Castle – a crucible of the industrial revolution – and just at the moment when it has finished celebrating the bicentenary of its construction in 1825 by William Crawshay II.

An instrument to build a future

Following the creation of the iron industry at Merthyr in the late 18th century, by 1800 the town had become the greatest centre of iron production in the world and remained so until 1860. Today, it is where the cultural, economic and environmental legacies of two centuries and more cry out for reinterpretation in a part of



Thomas Prytherch

‘No fewer than 13 of the 22 Welsh local authorities were in the bottom quintile. Five were in the south Wales valleys.’

Wales that cannot afford to ignore such a potent opportunity for recasting its image in the public mind. In the words, of the town's best-known historian, Gwyn A Williams:

‘The Welsh have repeatedly employed history to make a usable past, and to turn that past into an instrument with which a present can build a future.’

Nevertheless, at this point it is not difficult to imagine a chorus of scepticism. Is the country not in deep crisis? Is there not a panoply of social need crying out for funding? Is the Welsh Government not cash strapped? What prior claim on scarce resources can possibly be accorded to an ironmaster's castle and its museum and gallery? Get real.

Some answers to these questions are contained in a recently published study undertaken jointly by Cardiff University's School of Geography and Planning and Nottingham Business School – *Economic Possibilities across*

England and Wales: the NICE Index of Localities and Regions. This assessed 330 local areas across four measures: Networks, Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship. At the top of the list, of course, was the City of London. And at the bottom, at 330? You've guessed it. Merthyr Tydfil. Marginally above it – Blaenau Gwent at 328 and Anglesey at 325.

No fewer than 13 of the 22 Welsh local authorities were in the bottom quintile. Five were in the south Wales valleys: Rhondda Cynon Taf, Neath Port Talbot, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil. Out of the bottom 10 areas in the report's entrepreneurship index, nine were in Wales.

The report commented:

‘These places often suffer from low institutional density, weak network connectivity ... and limited access to cultural and creative infrastructure. [They] exemplify the compounding effects of economic peripherality, institutional fragility, and limited connectivity.’

It argued that post-industrial and rural areas have developed ‘self-limiting mindsets rooted in narratives of decline *that must be actively countered through behavioural interventions, choice architecture redesign, and forward-looking narrative building that highlights local successes and possibilities rather than historic failures*’ (my italics).

Arguably, in the case of Merthyr Tydfil, the last of the listed defects – ‘limited connectivity’ – has been addressed by the aforementioned completion of the Heads of the Valleys Road and the new Metro rail link. That leaves all the other assessment categories, not least of which is the cultural and creative infrastructure. And in that last field it would be hard to think of a more central proposition than the proposal to develop Cyfarthfa Castle and park into a cultural institution of both local and national significance, with all its implied beneficial economic and psychological effects, (See also *Touchstone* 2021 pp. 6–11).

2



- 1 Dowlais artist Thomas Prytherch's late-19th-century evocation of the Cyfarthfa Ironworks at Merthyr. There is a grandeur to the scene that still persists in the original 10 metre-high masonry furnaces built in 1765 by Anthony Bacon. They remain the most powerful relic in the Cyfarthfa heritage area. Can a new cultural strategy breathe life into this vital relic?
- 2 The Pont-y-cafnau bridge over the Taff at Cyfarthfa, Merthyr – reputedly the oldest iron bridge in the world. Built in 1793, a symbol of ambitious industrial innovation. Being restored after severe damage by Storm Dennis in February 2020, it is surely a prompt to a much-needed cultural ambition for Merthyr in the 21st century.

‘At the top of the list, of course, was the City of London. And at the bottom, at 330? You've guessed it. Merthyr Tydfil.’

‘This £30 million may seem like a large sum, but it pales into insignificance against, for instance, the £332 million earmarked for the new Museum of London or the £266 million cost of Tate Modern’s extension.’



- 3 The elements have played havoc with four-fifths of the Cyfarthfa Castle building, which has lain empty for 12 years. Alarming, this room is right above one of the open galleries. All these spaces have the potential to become a major new gallery, filling a huge cultural gap in the south Wales valleys
- 4 Having just celebrated the bicentenary of its construction in 1825, Cyfarthfa Castle, set in a 160-acre park and designed in 1824 for William Crawshay II by the architect Robert Lugar, surely has to be the vehicle for an ambitious Merthyr cultural rising.



Resilient accessible and cohesive

This approach lies at the heart of the Cyfarthfa Foundation’s proposals, totally aligned as they are with the Welsh Government’s recently published *Priorities for Culture 2024–2030* – ‘resilient, accessible and cohesive’. They include:

- the elevation of a local museum into one that showcases the historic international significance of the story of Merthyr Tydfil and its surrounding region;
- the urgent physical rescue of Cyfarthfa Castle – a Grade 1 listed building, 80% of which has lain empty and decaying for the last 12 years;
- the enlargement of its galleries not only to tell a fuller story with all the techniques now open to a modern museum, but also to better accommodate the castle’s fine existing collection of artworks and to allow for its expansion;
- the creation of a locally based cultural institution with the necessary critical mass to become a catalytic force economically, educationally and culturally within the

community, with an emphasis on Merthyr’s especially large cohort of young people;

- the curation of its 160-acre park – with its potential enlargement to 240 acres – not only as a park to rival the best in Wales but also as a forward-looking environmental project in a place where the memory of the Aberfan disaster is still alive; and
- to take full advantage of Cyfarthfa’s strategic location, including its proximity to the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park that attracts four million visitors per annum.

An unconscionable gap

It is also worth considering where Cyfarthfa might sit in the context of the emerging National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales. The Welsh Government understandably puts aside the concept of a single anchor gallery – for which Cyfarthfa was one of the bidders – and this has left us with the following chain of designated galleries across Wales: four in north Wales – Bangor, Llandudno, Pwllheli and Ruthin; one in mid Wales – Newtown, but two if you also count the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth;

two in south-west Wales – Swansea and Carmarthen; one in south-east Wales – Newport, but two if you include Amgueddfa Cymru in Cardiff. But the south Wales valleys? Nil. This is an unconscionable gap that Cyfarthfa would be more than capable of filling.

So what are the obstacles? The largest and most obvious obstacle is funding. A start was made in 2025 following a very welcome commitment of £2.25 million each from the council and the Welsh Government, to be spent on the urgent tasks of making a key part of the castle building watertight and safeguarding the Pont-y-cafnau bridge, arguably the oldest iron bridge in the world – it links Crawshay’s castle estate with the 263-year-old monumental furnace structures on the west side of the Taff.

The full rescue of the castle, however, will require a combined initial investment of more than £30 million from the National Heritage Lottery Fund, the council, Welsh Government and private foundations over the next five years. A full application to the National Heritage Lottery Fund has to follow hard on the heels of the acceptance of our expression of interest in mid-2025. We have already received two major pledges from private foundations, dependent on the backing



‘The alternative is to look to a far higher authority than a French queen, to someone who reminded us that we live “not by bread alone”.’

of the public institutions.

This may seem like a large sum, but it pales into insignificance against, for instance, the £332 million earmarked for the new Museum of London or the £266 million cost of Tate Modern’s extension. It is, however, comparable with the £50 million cost of the transformation now underway at Theatr Clwyd (see p. 63), to which the Welsh Government contributed £26.5 million. The capital cost of the Cyfarthfa project will after all be spread over a period of years. In time, the Cyfarthfa Foundation will aim to cover its annual running costs.

A manifest truth

As Cyfarthfa celebrated, the Welsh Government was in the throes of finalising its budget for the next financial year – 2026–27. Last year the

finance minister, Mark Drakeford, warned that, given the impending Senedd elections, it would be a standstill budget with new initiatives being proposed ‘only if they can command cross-party agreement’. One of the organisations hoping and praying that it will command such agreement will be the Cyfarthfa Foundation, as we reach a crucial stage in our plans to develop the castle and its park into a major visitor attraction.

The political parties are now busy preparing their programmes for the next Senedd term. One can but hope that they will be proposing to repair the damage done to the arts and culture during Covid and its aftermath.

There will, of course, be sceptics. There are some who see culture as a concern of the privileged, tarring them with the cynicism of Marie Antionette’s ‘let them eat cake’. The

alternative is to look to a far higher authority than a French queen, to someone who reminded us that we live ‘not by bread alone’. It is this second injunction that we need to ponder urgently as culture budgets struggle to cope. The cynical condescension of Marie Antionette was, of course, abhorrent, but the thought that we live ‘not by bread alone’ is manifestly true.

Our lives require both physical and emotional or, if you like, spiritual nourishment. And that applies just as much to society as a whole as to the individual. It is why cultural investment – be it on history or art or the natural environment – should not be forced to wait at the tail end of a long queue, to be dealt with only after every other category of social need has been met. Culture is part of the solution to a wider problem. And lest we forget, the most impoverished part of Wales has its spirit too.

Geraint Talfan Davies is the instigator of the current project to develop Cyfarthfa Castle and Park at Merthyr Tydfil and chair of the Cyfarthfa Foundation. He is a former controller of BBC Cymru Wales and a past chairman of Welsh National Opera and the Arts Council of Wales.

Community arts venue and Welsh language theatre

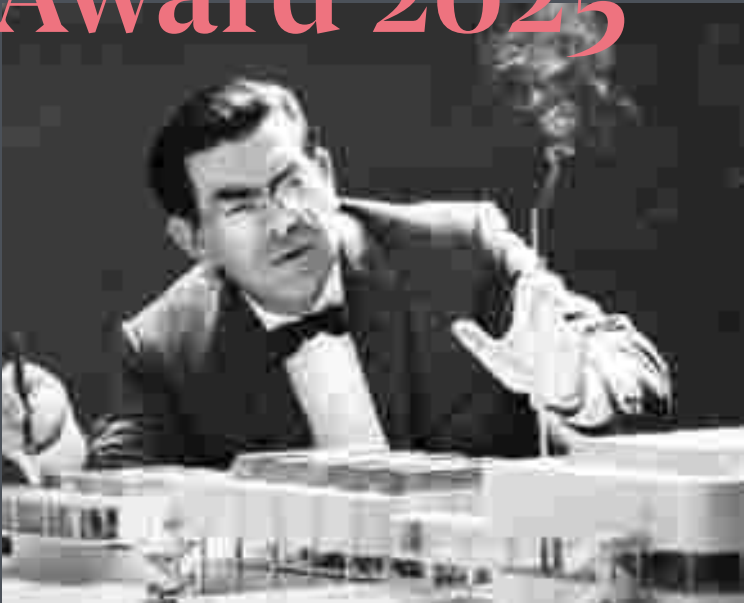


Welsh Architecture Awards 2025

Nyth, Bangor | Manalo & White

- RSAW Welsh Architecture Award
- RSAW Building of the Year
- RSAW Sustainability Award
- RSAW Client of the Year
- National Eisteddfod Norah Dunphy Gold Medal

Dewi-Prys Thomas Award 2025



Yn niwedd y nofel *Wythnos yng Nghymru Fydd*, pan fo'r prif gymeriad Ifan Powell wedi gweld dau weledigaeth ar gyfer dyfodol ei wlad, pwysleisir ei bod i fyny i bobl Cymru pa ddyfodol gaiff ei wiredd – trwy eu dewisiadau a gweithredoedd. Mae Gwobr Dewi-Prys Thomas yn gyfle i ni adnabod y prosiectau hynny sydd yn cyfrannu at y math o Gymru yr hoffem ni weld yn y dyfodol.

Mae'r wobwr yn adnabod pwysigrwydd dylunio da ar gyfer ansawdd bywyd, hunaniaeth ac adfywio Cymru ac yn cael ei gyflwyno i brosiect yng Nghymru, neu i ddylunwyr, artist neu debyg sydd yn ymateb orau i safle, a cyd-destun, gan gyfrannu yn positif at y synnwyr o lle, gan ddod i afael yn gyfrifol gyda heriau amgylcheddol ac cymdeithasol Cymru yn yr unfed ganrif ar hugain.

Dyma'r drydydd blwyddyn i Ymddiriedolaeth Dewi-Prys Thomas gyd-weithio gyda Cymdeithas

Dewi Prys Thomas



Frenhinol Penseiri yng Nghymru i rhyddhau gwobr flynyddol, yn hytrach na pob tair mlynedd, gyda'r enillydd yn cael ei gyhoeddi ar noson wobrwyo yn Cornerstone, Caerdydd, yn mis Mai.

The Dewi-Prys Thomas Award recognises the importance of good design to the quality of life, identity and regeneration of Wales; it is an opportunity to celebrate good design across a

wide range of design disciplines that contribute to our rich heritage and culture, and to reward projects of excellence, originality and utility in a range of fields including architecture, town planning, landscape design, public realm design, and public art.

A relatively small number of entries were received this year, with seven submissions of

various sizes from all over Wales, responding to different domestic, commercial and community needs. These included buildings that confidently and sensitively responded to their site, beautiful and intimate human-scale spaces designed for specific building users, schemes that directly addressed societal issues that are common across many of our communities, and an



Distillery and visitor centre



Hafod-Morfa Copperworks Distillery and Visitor Centre, Swansea
GWP Architecture and Archer Humphries Architects
– RSAW Welsh Architecture Award
– RSAW Conservation Award

New dwelling



Croes Fach, near Abergavenny
Hall + Bednarczyk Architects
– RSAW Welsh Architecture Award



Dewi-Prys Thomas Award 2024

intensely thoughtful response to the collective remembrance of lost lives and sacrifice.

From these, the judges reached a shortlist of three projects that they felt made a statement about what the future Wales should look like – rhain oedd yn gwireddu orau y Cymru Fydd: **Newport active travel bridge** yn Casnewydd gan Grimshaw; **Nyth**, hwb celfyddydol, diwylliannol a chymunedol (arts, culture and community hub) i Frân Wen, Bangor gan Manalo & White; a **Severn View Park Residential Home**, Portskewett gan Pentan Architects.



Newport active travel bridge (See also p.55) is clearly well used, making everyday life safer and more enjoyable for multiple users, but also aesthetically successful as an object – it is more than just another bridge.

Nyth has transformed a redundant, listed building into a new home for Frân Wen, the Welsh language theatre company, which is full of activity and energy.

Severn View Park (see *Touchstone* 2024 pp. 36–39) establishes an engaging model for integrating provision for older generations who suffer from the cruel impact of dementia, with its intimate scale and arrangement of spaces. How we might all wish for more facilities like it for our own loved ones.

Yr enillydd eleni... the winner this year... ydy Manalo & White, am Nyth, addasiad creadigol o gyn eglwys Fictoriaidd restredig, gradd II, i alluogi defnydd gymunedol gynaliadwy, a chyfrannu gyda cwmni'r Frân Wen at ddatblygiad celf a diwylliant yng Nghymru. Adeilad fydd, rydym yn sicr, yn gyfraniad gwerthfawr i'r Cymru Fydd.

Rhys Llwyd Davies

Dwelling extension


Delfyd Farm, Gower
 Rural Office

- RSAW Welsh Architecture Award
- RSAW Small Project of the Year
- RSAW Project Architect of the Year – Neill Hadrill

RSAW Awards jury

Chair of the jury

Ian Chalk

Regional representative

Priit Jürimäe

Lay assessor

Carl Meddings

Conservation specialist

Jennifer Chambers

Sustainability expert

Lilian Martins

National Eisteddfod selectors

Sarah Featherstone

Gavin Harris

Photos by Building Narratives

Dewi-Prys Thomas Award 2025 judges

Jo Breckon:

public art consultant and co-director of Studio Response, winner of the Dewi-Prys Thomas Award 2023

Priit Jürimäe:

architect, visiting critic at the Welsh School of Architecture, and panellist for the Design Commission for Wales

Professor emeritus Nancy Edwards:

former chair of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales

Jonathan Vining:

architect, urban designer, commissioner of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales, and trustee of the Dewi-Prys Thomas Trust

Rhys Llwyd Davies (chair):

architect and honorary secretary of the Dewi-Prys Thomas Trust



Diolch, Dafydd

Further to Aled Eurig's tribute (p. 42), Dafydd Elis-Thomas greatly valued the arts and their contribution to Welsh life. He was a kind and good friend to the Dewi-Prys Thomas Trust and enjoyed particularly being involved in the Dewi-Prys Thomas Prize scheme in 2012, for which he was the chair of the judging panel.

1 Launch of the Dewi-Prys Thomas Prize at the National Eisteddfod of Wales, Llandow, Vale of Glamorgan, 5 August 2012.

2 Dafydd hosting a lunch at the Senedd on 15 January 2013 to present the late Graham Brooks with his commendation, as he was unable to travel to the award ceremony at the Ruthin Craft Centre. Left to right: Graham Brooks, Malcolm Parry (chair of the D-PT Trust at the time), Dafydd Elis-Thomas, the late Wyn Thomas (former chair of the trust).

Jonathan Vining

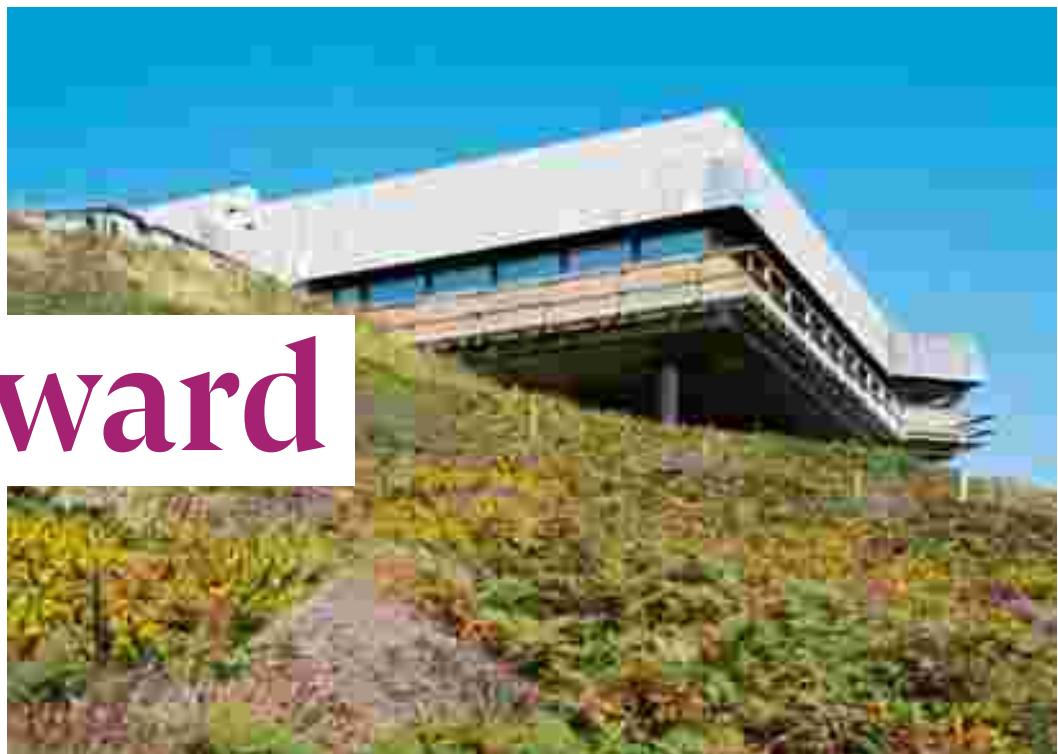
Listing leap forward

It has been a long uphill struggle over more than a decade to gain proper historic recognition by Cadw of key Welsh buildings of the 20th century, but finally 2025 was a bumper year of proper accreditation. **Jonathan Vining reports.**

It's a great pleasure to report that the three churches designed by Bill Davies that Cadw had placed under interim protection were all confirmed as listed at grade II on 27 March 2025; coincidentally, this was also Davies's 91st birthday. These were the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Benllech (S Powell Bowen, 1967); the Church of Christ the King, Towyn (Bowen Dann Davies, 1974); and the Church of St Illtyd, Rhuddlan (Bowen Dann Davies, 1976) (see *Touchstone*, 2024, pp. 76–77).

Two other post-war Roman Catholic churches were also listed arising from the *Taking Stock* project (<https://taking-stock.org.uk/>): St David's, Mold (Weightman & Bullen, 1965–66) – where 12 *dalle de verre* windows by the renowned Welsh artist, Jonah Jones (1909–2000) were relocated in 2022 – and St Joseph's, Denbigh (Gwilym Parry Davies, 1968).

In the last issue I reported also that one of the listing applications that the Twentieth Century Society had made, with the support of C2o Cymru, was the Inmos (now Newport WaferFab) microprocessor factory, Newport (Richard Rogers and Partners, 1982) – one of the most significant post-war buildings in Wales. This application was submitted over four years ago on 18 August 2021, but I am delighted to report that on 7 November 2025 Cadw listed Inmos at grade II* because of 'its architectural design as a key example of a manufacturing building ... and as the most important example of the British high-tech style of late modernist architecture in Wales'.



- 1 Swansea Maritime Rescue and Coordination Centre.
- 2 Inmos (now Newport WaferFab) microprocessor factory, Newport.

‘...on 7 November 2025 Cadw listed Inmos at grade II* because of “its architectural design as a key example of a manufacturing building ... and as the most important example of the British high-tech style of late modernist architecture in Wales”.’

Waiting in the wings

There are several other applications on which we are still awaiting a decision: Capel y Groes, Wrexham (Bowen Dann Davies Partnership, 1982), submitted on 5 July 2023; the at-risk Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water headquarters, Nelson (J R Gammon, H O Williams & Associates, 1971); the Llandinam Building (1960) and the Physics Building (1962) at Aberystwyth University, both by Sir Percy Thomas and Son, submitted on 31 October 2023; and finally the disused Swansea Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre, Mumbles, Swansea (Property Services Agency/The Riches & Blythin Partnership, early 1980s), submitted on 17 December 2024.

There were several interesting post-war listings in 2025 that were *not* the result of requests

from the Twentieth Century Society. The first was an amendment to the existing designation of the main arts building at Bangor University to include the extensions to it by Sir Percy Thomas and Son of 1963 and 1968. Next, and also at Bangor University, the brutalist Brambell Building by Sir Percy Thomas and Son, 1969 (*Touchstone*, 2021, p. 22), which was listed grade II on 8 January 2025.

Wrexham Waterworld (F D Williamson & Associates, 1970), which was under interim protection at the time of writing last year, was duly listed at grade II on 19 February 2025. One of Graham Brooks’s finest individual houses, 13 Howell’s Crescent, Llandaf, Cardiff (Hird & Brooks, 1980) was listed grade II on 11 July 2025. And finally, on 22 July 2025, the designation of the former Welsh Board of Health (later Welsh Office)



- 3 Roman Catholic Church of St David, Mold.
- 4 Roman Catholic Church of St Joseph, Denbigh.

- 5, 6 Isaacs house, 13 Howell’s Crescent, Llandaf, Cardiff.
- 7 Brambell Building, Bangor.
- 8 Crown Building, Cathays Park, Cardiff.



‘The society had selected the building to represent Wales in its Coming of Age campaign – a campaign that each year celebrates the best buildings in the UK turning 30 years old and, therefore, becoming eligible for listing.’

building in Cathays Park, Cardiff was extended to include the Alex Gordon Partnership-designed Crown Office ‘extension’ of 1971–79.

Wildlife listing?

On 11 March 2025, the Twentieth Century Society submitted a listing request to Cadw for the Welsh Wildlife Centre at Cilgerran (Niall Phillips Architects, 1994) (9–12). This was in response to news that a planning permission had been granted for a design by Childs Sulzmann Architects to refurbish and extend the centre. The society had selected the building to represent Wales in its Coming of Age campaign – a campaign that each year celebrates the best buildings in the UK turning 30 years old and, therefore, becoming eligible for listing.

Childs Sulzmann’s proposals include a lower-ground-floor-level extension to the west with stairs to an open terrace and a new covered public entrance at ground floor level; the demolition and reconstruction of the bridge at first floor level on the north elevation; the insertion of two new sets of double timber-framed doors to the south elevation; and the introduction of timber *brises soleil* to the south and west elevations (13). The proposals are intended to resolve challenges that the visitor centre faces through increased visitor numbers and climate change, and to help the centre deliver a more diverse and inclusive range of activities.

The society considers that the proposed alterations, particularly the *brises soleil* to the south, would have a seriously detrimental impact on the building. However, at the time of writing, Cadw had not been able to take any action on the listing application owing to other priorities – and in September the National Heritage Lottery Fund awarded the over £2.4 million towards the cost of the refurbishment proposals.

Jonathan Vining is casework coordinator for C2o Cymru.

All photographs by Jonathan Vining, except numbers 12 and 13.



9–12
Welsh Wildlife Centre,
Cilgerran, by Niall Phillips
Architects 1994.

13
CGI of Childs Sulzmann’s
proposals.

9



10



11



12



Patrick Hamay

13



The climate of manifestos

With climate refuseniks grabbing more and more of the headlines, and poll after poll of public opinion quietly registering the existential threat of climate change as being an urgent priority, practical actions and choices have to be made – and fast. **John Carter** extracts from the substantial research underpinning the *Wales Net Zero 2035* reports what should be in all our manifestos for 2026



Everyone in Wales (and beyond) should set aside time to read *Wales Net Zero 2035* (WNZ2035). It is a magnum opus for our times, commissioned in 2023 by the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, under the formal cooperation agreement between the two, but by the time it was published in September 2024 that formal cooperation had collapsed. (More of that later.)

WNZ2035, comprising a summary report, an enabling report and five subject-specific reports, should not, in my view, be a solitary read. It is for sharing and debating and, importantly, for acting *collectively upon* and acting *now*. Two of the reports' stated imperatives are the need to act quickly and collaboratively – via a coordinated, speedy and just transition to net zero in all areas of life. How perturbing, then, to read, in the

Excerpts and comments: *challenge reports*



Challenge report 1:

Enabling the transition to net zero by 2035

'In addition to securing a just transition to net zero within our borders, Wales' actions need to be globally responsible. Our resource use, pollution and supply chains ultimately generate real-world impacts with global reach. While we are a small nation, our actions can positively contribute to global efforts to address climate change, especially in our ability to trial innovative approaches to governance fit for present and future needs. The pioneering *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act* is a case in point, influencing similar initiatives in other countries, inciting international Networking 60, and prompting UN action that will hopefully culminate in adopting a Declaration for Future Generations at a global summit in autumn 2024.' This didn't occur.



Challenge report 6:

How could people and places be connected by 2035?

Travel less, travel differently, travel better says this WNZ2035 report, which suggests not to replace every fossil-fuelled car with an electric car, but to connect people and places in a more equitable manner via: improved, decarbonised public transport; active travel, in car-free environments; with car-sharing, where car use is unavoidable – the last part of a 'library of [shared] things'.

Enabling the transition to net zero by 2025 report, that the government and local authorities in Wales are not currently sufficiently joined up in the ways required to do so. The authors suggest appointing ‘net zero brokers to support cross-government collaboration’. And yet this is in a country with bedrock legislation, via the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act*, the five ways of working in which are ready-made to, as the report notes, ‘de-silo and integrate levels of government’! Is this yet more evidence that those public service board arms of the act are still pretty dysfunctional?

Reading such a critique of our political ‘establishments’ could lead to despair. Alternatively, it could suggest that citizens need to take matters into their own hands, via both bottom-up local initiatives and actions, and via pressure on elected politicians. If we are to rise to the climate challenge this twin course of action is the only game in town.

The authors of the reports are very clear that while actions also need to be taken at the very highest political level in that ‘responsibility for net zero delivery should remain with the First Minister’, they also argue that at local level ‘support must continue and expand for projects

‘A conversation with one of the principal authors reveals that WNZ2035 has not had the traction that was anticipated and needed. This may be linked to the collapse of the Labour-Plaid Cymru cooperation agreement and the attendant competition between the two parties involved, and other political parties, in the run-up to Senedd elections in 2026.’

that appropriately and proportionately involve citizens in delivery or decision-making ... and for projects that empower’.

So, do discuss the reports’ recommendations in these contexts; debate and act at home, debate and act in the workplace; debate and act within your local community; and debate and act within Welsh and local governments. Citizens can be ‘brokers’ too! Inspiration can be taken from the case studies in their documentation. They show that actions are possible and are happening now and near you!

From all of this you will gather that the enabling report packs a powerful punch in its own right; but don’t neglect the underpinning foundations of the several subject-specific ‘challenge reports’ on which this enabling report is built. There is insufficient space in this review to interrogate WNZ2035 in detail, but set out below are several noteworthy moments of the enabling report and attendant supporting challenge reports. These reports provide rich food for thought and importantly, show clearly that net zero 2035 is possible if we act NOW.



Challenge report 3:

How could Wales feed itself by 2035?

Recommended key actions include ‘a just transition for farmers and growers’ and a prioritisation of ‘locally sustainably-produced food through public procurement to develop local markets and distribution chains’.

Set these against, for example, the struggles of One Planet Developments with WNZ2035 reporting that ‘OPD Planning Permission is difficult to obtain ... due to inconsistencies in the policy interpretation and application’, and we have another example of silo mentality. One of the challenges writ large!

For further inspiration on the food front do read the impressive ‘The City of Copenhagen’s food strategy’, available through the link on page 30 of *How could Wales feed itself by 2035?*



Challenge report 5:

How could Wales meet energy needs whilst phasing out fossil fuels by 2035?

On this subject area, WNZ2035 is clear that Wales, with its natural resources of wind and water is well placed to decarbonise energy generation, but it would require significant investment in several large scale projects, e.g. tidal streams and/or tidal barriers, alongside more local community projects (e.g. solar and wind). The proposed inter-governmental brokers would have to work hard on this, but community-scale energy generation could help too. As citizens we can be active at both scales, i.e. lobbying government to act on large-scale projects and direct action within communities. Every architecture project is an opportunity for the latter!

Herein lies the central challenge: the reports are now almost 16 months post-publication, and what has been ‘ticked off’? The ‘pathway’ on page 6 of the enabling report is a good test of this. I will leave you, the reader, to form your own opinion(s), but one particular pathway action, under the ‘political leadership’ moniker, jumps out:

‘Develop and publish cross-party manifesto commitments for net zero 2035 by 2025.’

What hope of this with the prospect of Reform UK in the mix? Let’s hope that Plaid Cymru and Labour find each other again.

The science of climate change and biodiversity loss is proven, although Reform UK would beg to differ. This loss of cross-party unity will affect all of us, irrespective of political persuasion! The absence of cross-party manifesto commitments will have wasted the period up to the Senedd elections in May 2026. This equates to a potential 18 lost months out of the 10 years available for the actions required to reach net zero 2035 (page 10 of the enabling report, ‘A.2 Our risk of inaction’).

To add weight to this time imperative, in 2023 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), made up of the world’s leading climate scientists, issued what they called ‘our final warning’ (IPCC’s *AR6 Synthesis Report*,

published in March 2023).

You will find all of the challenge reports mentioned below and the attendant summary and enabling reports on the Wales Net Zero 2035 website: <https://netzero2035.wales/>, but what you will not find on this website are any updates on how the Wales Net Zero 2035 reports have been received and disseminated since their publication in September 2024. A conversation with one of the principal authors reveals that WNZ2035 has not had the traction that was anticipated and needed. This may be linked to the collapse of the Labour-Plaid Cymru cooperation agreement and the attendant competition between the two parties involved, and other political parties, in the run-up to Senedd elections in 2026. At the very moment that we need collaboration, agreement and action on this existential matter, we have the very opposite: inaction! It may also be because of the sheer scale and somewhat daunting nature of the actions required, but the good news on this front is that WNZ2035 is ready-made for solutions-focused engagement at all levels.

So, I hear you ask, can we not revert to our original Wales net zero target of 2050, to give us more time to overcome these hurdles to net zero 2035? The previously-mentioned IPCC report

states that ‘the science’ makes it clear that we need to accelerate towards net zero. We don’t know, with certainty, how much time we have to achieve it, since the earth’s ‘tipping points’ have not been seen before.

In the absence of cooperation at government level, this is perhaps where community action and cooperation, and cross-community working, comes in. We don’t need to take all of this on our own individual shoulders. We can share and support. We can get out of our silos. We can act together and, importantly, we can lobby national and local governments to do the same. This vital report and the labour (sweat and tears!) for the common good that has gone into it, deserves action! No, it *requires* action, and it requires it today!

John Carter co-founded Cardiff-based Pentan Architects in 1995. For over 30 years he taught and practised architecture, before in 2015 taking on the role of programme leader of the MArch course at the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT), Machynlleth. He retired from this role in 2021 but continues to teach at CAT, alongside his work with Pentan.



Challenge report 2:

What could education, skills and work look like across Wales by 2035?

Among several recommendations is to ‘create a carbon and nature literate workforce by establishing a continuing professional development pathway for all professionals by 2028.’

Surely we, the architectural profession in Wales, should have initiated this already? We could usefully use these WNZ2035 reports to kick-start such vital continuing professional development.



Challenge report 4:

How could Wales heat and build homes and workplaces by 2035?

One recommendation is a ‘pragmatic approach to fabric upgrades’. This is recognition that the main challenge lies in the existing building stock and that an upgrade to Enerphit or an equivalent high thermal standard is not achievable within the timescale – partly based on the numbers of properties, ownership and poverty; partly based on the lack of sufficient and skilled ‘upgraders’; and partly based on the capital required. For the last the report makes it clear that the Development Bank of Wales would be key to funding provision.

Alongside this there is a clear and unequivocal recommendation for decarbonisation of heating and hot water provision via heat pumps. There is a potential conflict here in that to be effective heat pumps require a reasonable thermal upgrade to building fabric to ensure that running costs (within today’s energy market) are not risking fuel poverty through higher (than boilers) running costs. The road to net zero 2035 is paved with similar pragmatic hurdles. What it most probably means is that we have to work harder in areas that are more achievable (we can learn from Passivhaus principles here) if we are to fully address the sceptics’ concerns.

touchstones

1



CONTRASTING LESSONS

The safeguarding 2.4 metre high perimeter fencing that now has to surround the grounds of every school is a sad but maybe realistic indictment of where our society stands. It seems it also has another symbolic role, keeping out well-intentioned information seekers.

Two completed new schools in Monmouthshire, seven years apart, could offer up a stimulating contrast in their spatial design approaches for education. Both were commissioned by the same authority officers. In both cases the excellent pupil/staff/governor/client-liaison role for each project was carried out by Tim Bird, the former deputy head at Monmouth Comprehensive School. Both were funded under the same Welsh Government schools' procurement programme.

Looking at the spatial dispositions of the two schools one could be struck by the remarkable differences between Monmouth's comprehensive by architect BDP (opened 2018) (1, 3) and the King Henry VIII 3-19 School at Abergavenny by Rio Architects (opened 2025) (2, 4). On the surface it would seem that while Monmouth was pursuing some of the latest state-of-the-art progressive spatial design arrangements for schools (1, 3), the Abergavenny scheme has followed a more traditional classroom-corridor arrangement. To what degree is this a response to handling very different site constraints? Were Abergavenny's

2



governors and head simply holding different educational perspectives on what was best for their pupils? Had the council's education officers learnt some challenging lessons from the earlier Monmouth experiment? How do the Welsh Government's education advisers and officials view this fascinating contrast? Is this a result of budget cuts over the seven-year gap between the two? Is Abergavenny the model for the future and, if so, why? We have things to learn here.

Touchstone tried many routes to gain access – emails to education departmental heads, county councillors, senior officers, and one of the headmasters, but all passed it up the line to Will Mclean, strategic director – learning, skills and economy; no reply was forthcoming, despite repeated email enquiries.

Even an exploratory visit by the *Touchstone* editor to the Abergavenny school site during the summer vacation – when all the pupils and staff were on holiday – was met by a caretaker/groundsman stating this was private ground and the editor should leave instantly. The editor shouldn't have used the open gate through the otherwise impenetrable perimeter protection even if this was notionally public realm. Must learn to do better, would be the school report, must try again.

3



4





THE STATE OF ESTATES

There have been profound concerns across decades in the university sector but especially post-Covid-19 about the under-utilisation of their estates.

An outstanding 'distinction' thesis and project by post-graduate student Roma Richardson at the Welsh School of architecture, from unit 6 led by Dr Hiral Patel, tackled the issue head-on with huge energy, imagination and skill.

Richardson sets out the challenge succinctly:

'Responding to changing student patterns, falling enrolment, and the rise of remote study, this project fosters a people-centred university campus by reimagining the university experience. Focusing on the Cardiff University Brain Research Imaging Centre (CUBRIC) building as a case study, the thesis advocates adaptive reuse. Transforming a single-use, shockingly low-occupancy facility into an efficient multi-use academic, residential, retail, and recreational building. This boosts

building efficiency, campus vibrancy, and supports the university's financial future. By utilising existing structures, land, and services, the project significantly reduces embodied carbon compared to demolition and new build. This approach conserves resources, minimises cost, and avoids the environmental impact of developing green/brownfield sites, whilst freeing those areas to be upgraded to vibrant, landscaped civic spaces for students, staff, and the wider community to enjoy.'

Richardson further explains that:

'At the start of the year, the Cardiff University Estates team also gave us a presentation highlighting current issues, which helped shape the brief and direction of the project. During the design process we had reviews where Estates were invited as guests. They gave very helpful feedback and especially liked the tiered system approach to rethinking the buildings.'


This is such a good news story, a university estates department engaged fully with its school of architecture. Long may it continue. Oh, and by the way, Richardson was awarded Best Graphics of the Year 2025 (March 2), presented by Foster + Partners, and was also nominated for the RSAW Student Award. Top stuff.



To contact Roma Richardson for further details of the scheme email roma.richardson@gmail.com

Tributes

Dafydd Elis-Thomas 18/10/1946 – 07/02/2025 *Building the Senedd*

- 
- 1 Embracing team members that created the Senedd at their tenth anniversary gathering, Dafydd Elis-Thomas (second right) shares the celebratory moment with (from left), Richard Wilson, Rosemary Butler, Sue Essex, and architects Richard Rogers and Ivan Harbour.

2 Facing page: The Senedd's first presiding officer, Dafydd Elis-Thomas, at work in the chamber.

The Right Honourable Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas of Nant Conwy was known to most his colleagues as ‘Dafydd El’.

In May 1999, he was elected to The National Assembly for Wales, as its llywydd (presiding officer) for its first ten years. He worked with the first minister, Rhodri Morgan, to embed the new institution into Welsh life, and secured an iconic home for the assembly – the award-winning Senedd building, which reflected the principles of a transparent democracy.

Elis-Thomas did not believe that ‘a proper parliament in Wales’ could function in the old

Welsh Office building of Crickhowell House, and felt strongly that the Senedd should have ‘daylight and fresh air’. He was inspired by Dewi Prys Thomas, the first professor of architecture at the Welsh School of Architecture, and supported by the Royal Society of Architects in Wales.

In 1998, when the design competition for the new building was launched, the assembly’s office block, Crickhowell House was renamed unilaterally by Dafydd Elis-Thomas as Tŷ Hywel, after Hywel Dda, the law-giving prince of Deheubarth. To Dafydd Elis’s delight, Richard Rogers’ architectural practice was selected to undertake the design of the new assembly building, and he was the project’s most fervent supporter, in spite of the stop-start nature of the building work, and the Welsh Government’s concerns at cost overruns. In a move to support the Rogers design proposal, the worried members of the Royal Society of Architects in Wales twinned all 60 assembly members with an architect in



their constituency to argue the case for the use of modern architecture in the project.

He exhorted assembly members to vote in favour of funding its completion, and worked closely with Lord Rogers to maintain the project's architectural integrity. In spite of rising costs, the building was completed in 2006, and as presiding officer, he unilaterally named the new building the *Senedd*.

The building was modernist in its design, and incorporated the highest environmental standards – with the use of renewable technologies and energy efficiency integrated into its design – and used Welsh materials such as slate and Welsh oak in its construction. The timber ceiling and central funnel were made of Canadian cedar, but the slate came from Cwt-y-Bugail, Blaenau Ffestiniog in Elis-Thomas's constituency. The building was awarded an 'excellent' certification by the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method, the highest awarded in Wales at the time, and was nominated for the 2006 Stirling Prize.

Dafydd Elis-Thomas's unilateral naming of the building as the *Senedd* was controversial but reflected his personal commitment to the project.

He has been recognised as one of the most influential Welsh political figures of the past fifty years, as the 'founding father' of the Senedd, and a 'political giant'.

A son of the manse, he was born in Carmarthen, and brought up in Llanrwst in the Conwy valley. A brilliant academic with a specialism in Welsh medieval literature, he gave it up for politics, when he was elected as Plaid Cymru MP for Merioneth in February 1974.

An energetic and campaigning MP, between 1974 and 1992, he supported Labour's unsuccessful devolution proposals in 1979. Following that, he moved Plaid Cymru towards the left and, in 1984, became Plaid Cymru's president, led it to support the miners' strike, and aligned the party with the

decade's main causes – anti-Thatcherism, the Welsh language movement, Greenham Common, and the anti-apartheid campaign.

In 1992, he controversially took a seat in the House of Lords and was appointed chair of the Welsh Language Board, where he attempted to ensure that the language was seen as available to all, and above party politics.

After standing down as *Ilywydd* to the Senedd in 2011, he fell out with Plaid Cymru's leader and, in 2016, left the party to become an independent member of the National Assembly for Wales. In 2017, he was appointed the Welsh Government's deputy minister for culture, sport and tourism – a role that he delighted in and to which he was eminently suited. Typically his overseeing of the May 2017 report *Future Landscapes: Delivering for Wales: The Review of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks in Wales* demonstrated his constant willingness to support those challenging the over-comfortable status quo, reminding authorities they were there for all the people and their well-being and welfare, not just to preserve the beauty.

He was mischievous, challenging, but also a profoundly serious man, perceptive, lively,

charming, courteous and inspirational. He understood the need for Plaid Cymru to extend its political hinterland, and as presiding officer, he knew the importance of ensuring that the legitimacy of the new assembly, was recognised by the support of the members of the royal family for instance, who attended every official opening.

His loss is not solely to the political and public world of course. It is a huge loss to his family – to Mair his wife, his sons Rolant, Meilyr and Cai, their mother and Dafydd's friend, Elen, and his grand-children, Mali, Osian, Llew and Bleddyn, who have lost a loving taid.

The King was one of over 400 people who wrote to Lord Elis-Thomas's widow, paying a warm tribute to him after his death:

'There can be few people who have contributed so much to the lives of their nation, in so many fields, for so long. I hope it will be of at least some small comfort to you, in your loss, to know the enormous respect in which your husband was held by so many people from all walks of life.'

Aled Eirig

'He has been recognised as one of the most influential Welsh political figures of the past fifty years, as the "founding father" of the Senedd, and a "political giant".'

Dafydd Elis-Thomas, politician:
born Carmarthen 18 October 1946;
married Elen, 1970 (three sons), divorced;
married Mair Parry-Jones 1993;
died Cardiff, 7 February 2025.

The biography *Dafydd Elis-Thomas: Nationbuilder* by Aled Eirig was published by the University of Wales Press, 20 September 2025.



Tributes



Sylvia Fowles

Robert Fowles

27/05/1942 – 28/04/2025

*Participator for
architecture*

Robert Fowles, known as Bob, who taught at the Welsh School of Architecture from 1972 until 2004, has died at the age of 82. The early 1970s marked a significant period of intellectual development of the Welsh School of Architecture (WSA): Professor Patrick O'Sullivan was recruited to lead on architectural science; human studies came to the fore under Professor Alan Lipman (students also had weekly lectures in the psychology department at what was then the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology (UWIST)); and then in 1972 Fowles was appointed to develop the emerging subject area of 'design methods'.¹ He also took the helm of the first year of the architectural studies degree.

It is for the latter that most readers will remember Bob. He led first year with his bountiful encouragement of all students, regardless of their aptitude. He set his teaching in the context of a deep love for the subject and what it could offer to society if we as architects engaged with user-clients. To that he added the Bauhaus-inspired ingredient of hands-on practical building: the summer-term build projects with colleague Mike Harries will live long in the memories of those who participated.

In his teaching – 'exploration' is probably a better word for Bob's approach to learning – he sought to help his students to understand how they designed and the methods that they might use to help them to design. With this demystification he was able to circumnavigate the 'waiting-for-divine-intervention' freeze that can afflict fledgling architects. For Bob it was a

logical step from this to design-participation for all ('co-designing' in contemporary parlance): the more stakeholders, the richer and more functionally appropriate the architecture. From this came 'community studies' and 'live projects' for his students, across the length and breadth of Wales. I remember one project in Burry Port for which Bob had organised a community brainstorming day, to flesh out the brief for the project in question. For part of the day he led the best part of 50 highly excited children in a guided imagery session, to help them to explore what the project meant to, and for, them. This was Bob in his Pied-Piper mode, and what a sight it was! Excitement became intense focus and then more excitement as the children's imaginations were released via an invitation to draw what they had imagined. Bob was always questioning why children could draw freely, with little encouragement, while most adults, when invited to draw their 'dreams', became tense and self-conscious. He had the advantage that his love of architecture and drawing had been fostered in the art-school environment of Cheltenham School of Architecture. Indeed, in his retirement Bob immersed himself in life drawing and became a skilled and inventive practitioner of this art. He could draw with both hands at the same time!

A practical approach to life and learning was also writ large in the aforementioned design-build projects that marked the summer term rite-of-passage for his first year students. From farmers' barns to community projects, we learnt by doing. To enable this way of learning Bob took considerable risks, which he passionately believed to be worth it for the learning that came with it. One of these potential risks was to Bob's academic career. Such activities (design-participation and design-build projects) were not, and are still not, mainstream research activities in UK architectural education, but Bob, aided by his design methods' expertise, made sure that these 'alternative' ways of learning were written up and disseminated in a scholarly and rigorous manner, often via Design Research Society (DRS) publications. (Bob was a stalwart of the DRS throughout his career.) In this way he was able to bring academic credibility to these non-mainstream activities in architectural education and, importantly, disseminate his

learning among the wider architectural education community – both at home and abroad. There are many schools of architecture that owe Bob a great debt for this.

Bob was not just hands-on within architectural education. Just like the pioneers of the Centre for Alternative Technology, he saw the sustainability 'light' in the 1970s and decided, with his wife Sylvia, that a more sustainable and self-sufficient lifestyle was necessary for their family as well as for society generally. So, in 1978 Bob, Sylvia and their children moved to a smallholding (complete with Iron Age hill fort) in the Monmouthshire hills, between the Usk and Wye valleys. Living off and, importantly, *with* this land, became one of Bob's great passions. It included the learning of new skills from seasoned practitioners – hedge laying, for example. This and other traditional ways of working with nature were lovingly and beautifully recorded in his many sketch books. He revered this land and sought to learn from those who had been there before him – and took his role as custodian of his family's special place very seriously. His deep thinking on this and other matters has much to teach us.

Bob was truly a man for all seasons and I, for one, will remember him as both friend and mentor, and as the man who introduced me, in my first year at the WSA, to the literature of, for example, Fritz Schumacher (*Small is Beautiful*) and Alvin Toffler (*Future Shock*). Alongside his boundless encouragement, what better gift to give a young architect?

His teaching lives on.

John Carter

'He led first year with his bountiful encouragement of all students, regardless of their aptitude. He set his teaching in the context of a deep love for the subject and what it could offer to society if we as architects engaged with user-clients.'

Robert Arthur Fowles, architect and educator: born Stoke-on-Trent 27 May 1942; married Sylvia Atkinson 1966 (one son, two daughters); died Grange University Hospital, Llanfrehfa, 28 April 2025

John Carter co-founded Cardiff-based Pentan Architects in 1995. For over 30 years he taught and practised architecture, before in 2015 taking on the role of programme leader of the MArch course at the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT), Machynlleth. He retired from this role in 2021 but continues to teach at CAT, alongside his work with Pentan.

Reference:

- 1 Many architects in the early 1960s, particularly those in academia, were enthusiastic about the capability of design methods to demystify the design process and so provide an ideal framework for the teaching of "how to design". From: 'Design Methods & Theories', in: *The Journal of the Design Methods Group*, volume 13, number 1, January–March 1979.

Book reviews



Sidney Colwyn Foulkes: The Architecture of a Reluctant Modernist

Adam Voelcker —
University of Wales Press

Simon Unwin

Born in 1884 and dying in 1971, Sidney Colwyn Foulkes was an almost exact contemporary of the better known Clough Williams-Ellis (1881–1978). Both worked primarily in north Wales and began their careers with no formal architectural education. Both had an innate aptitude for design. Their early development as architects was in the Edwardian era with its preoccupation with historical ‘styles’, but in the ensuing decades both had to contend with the emergence of modernism. One senses that neither ever quite understood the latter; their sensibilities leant more toward a sometimes whimsical eclecticism, an anathema in modern architecture. Clough, knighted in later life, may be more widely celebrated because of Portmeirion, but Adam Voelcker’s new volume in the University of Wales Press’s ‘The Architecture of Wales Series’ shows Foulkes to have been an accomplished and in some ways more serious architect in his own right. One cannot claim that Foulkes was one of the pioneering architectural minds of the twentieth century, nor that he had the flamboyance of Clough Williams-Ellis, but Voelcker spins an interesting narrative from the threads of Foulkes’s career, inconsistent in quality though it was (as Voelcker admits in his preface).

Those threads provide the content for ten loosely chronological chapters, each covering a theme in Foulkes’s work. The first covers his ‘Formative Years’, from being thrust into running the family building firm at the age of 16 (when his father Edward withdrew owing to bankruptcy) to 1914 when he entered formal architectural education in Liverpool

‘Clough, knighted in later life, may be more widely celebrated because of Portmeirion, but Adam Voelcker’s new volume... shows Foulkes to have been an accomplished and in some ways more serious architect in his own right.’

under C H Reilly. His very first project – a Pierrot stage for a local impresario (acquired after opening a misdirected letter to another E Foulkes, a local decorator) – and idiosyncratic designs for 1930s cinemas (some could be illustrations in Robert Venturi’s 1966 book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*!) are discussed in the second chapter, ‘From Arcadia to Plazas’. And his later career move into landscaping post-war hydro-electric schemes is covered in the last-but-two chapter, ‘“A New Orbit”: Industrial Landscaping’. In-between there are chapters on: the contributions Foulkes made to town architecture, particularly in Colwyn Bay (‘Civic Pride’); schools and health-care buildings (‘Community Service’); post-second-world-war housing (‘Homes Fit for Housewives’); his occasional designs for churches and parish buildings (‘Parish and People’); private houses (‘Bread and Butter – and Sometimes Jam’); and ‘Some Further Projects’. The tenth chapter, ‘A Man for All Seasons’, discusses Foulkes’s contributions to architecture particularly in north Wales but also more generally. An eleventh is a ‘Postscript’ that gives an account of the practice after the 1960s by which time Foulkes’s involvement had lessened and it became Colwyn Foulkes & Partners (partners included his wife Elizabeth (see *Touchstone* 2023, p. 49), their son Ralph, Gerald Latter and Lawrie Williams).

Of all, the chapter I found most interesting – it is also the longest by far – is ‘Homes Fit for Housewives’, which focuses on Foulkes’s most notable housing schemes: primarily at Beaumaris (Cae Bricks), Llanrwst (Cae Tyddyn) and Llandrillo-yn-Rhos (Elwy Road). Here Voelcker demonstrates an architect’s understanding and empathy for a fellow professional grappling with post-war government guidance on space standards to produce optimum domestic plans, simple yet attractive elevations and site layouts using sloping ground positively rather than as a disadvantage.

As a reviewer maybe I should find something to complain about! But in this case I cannot – except perhaps

to question Voelcker’s subtitle: the book is less focused on Foulkes’s relationship with modernism than it is a general account of his career as an architect. (And I’m not sure I agree with Voelcker’s suggestion that Clough understood modern architecture better than Foulkes. Both struggled. And it is likely that Ralph Foulkes, working in his father’s practice after the war, had more enthusiasm for the new way of designing than either of his elders.) Despite the lack of clear identity and intellectual underpinning in Foulkes’s work, Voelcker has produced a book that is well researched and lucidly written. In an engaging tone, and with sympathy for the challenges of design, he tells the story of a naturally inclined and talented architect. Though Foulkes may be described as ‘provincial’, he did make a personal contribution to British architecture in the twentieth century more generally, particularly in regard to social housing and industrial landscaping after the second world war.

One might imagine that, in his lofty patrician way, Clough may have been somewhat, if passively, patronising towards his friend, the diminutive son of a builder. But Voelcker shows Foulkes, though less celebrated than Clough, to have been the better all-round architect. The monograph finishes with the obituary Clough wrote for Foulkes in *The Times*. It ends fondly:

‘... one of the endearing things about this modest, rather shy but dedicated artist [was that] he would fight like a lion for what he believed was most fitting, come what might’.

Simon Unwin is emeritus professor of architecture at the University of Dundee. He lives in Cardiff where he taught for many years in the Welsh School of Architecture. He is the author of books including Analysing Architecture, Twenty-Five+ Buildings Every Architect Should Understand, and Exercises in Architecture.

Book reviews



The Alienation Effect: How Central European Émigrés Transformed the British Twentieth Century

Owen Hatherley | Allen Lane

David Magyar

Growing up in an émigré family, our dinner table was frequently populated with Hungarian and central European artists and architects. I did not know it at the time, but their journeys to Britain were inspired by a very influential group of predecessors. Owen Hatherley's persuasive and meticulously researched cultural history, *The Alienation Effect*, makes a powerful case for how the contributions of this group shaped twentieth-century Britain, particularly in the visual arts and architecture.

In the opening paragraphs, Hatherley provides us with a taste of how deep and wide this influence has been, skilfully using architecture to make his case. In a witty anecdote of a walk he took following a visit to St Thomas' Hospital in south London, he describes being struck by the contrast between the Gothic ornamentalism of the Palace of Westminster and the clean, simple and rational lines of the building he had just left. One an expression of what is quintessentially English/British, the other of something new and alien – of modernism.

Tracing the threads of the design of St Thomas' to the Palace of Pensions in Prague (a notable reference point for functionalist and constructivist architecture), Hatherley connects us to Eugene Rosenberg, who had a substantial hand in the design of both buildings. Rosenberg had fled Czechoslovakia in the face of fascism in 1939 and settled in Britain, establishing the architectural firm Yorke, Rosenberg and Mardall, and becoming a prominent member of the emerging modern architectural scene.

In this way, we are introduced to the idea of the 'alienation effect' – the transformative effect that new and radical émigré ideas had on Britain in the period 1933–40, and for many years afterwards. This is not a light read – there are well over 500 pages to which I cannot do justice here – but the book's extraordinary coverage makes it a highly worthwhile one.

The narrative extends well beyond London, following a path many émigrés were either forced, or chose, to take having encountered expressions of outrage, vilification and xenophobia – parallels with the Little Britain-ism we are witnessing today. Some suffered internment on the Isle of Man, while others sought refuge outside the metropolis, hoping to find more welcoming environments.

The arc of travel takes us to Newcastle and Gateshead, where the modern urban architecture of 1970s is declared to be the real star of the show in the Michael Caine movie, *Get Carter*, in that it presents a major shift in British cinema and how the nation was being viewed. Significantly, the film is the work of the cinematographer Wolfgang 'Wolf' Suschitzky, an Austrian

'Owen Hatherley's persuasive and meticulously researched cultural history ... makes a powerful case for how the contributions of this group shaped twentieth-century Britain, particularly in the visual arts and architecture.'



Wayne Forster

who had freelanced for the Hungarian photojournalist, Stefan Lorant, and his magazine *Picture Post*.

Founded in 1938, the magazine revolutionised the way photographers portrayed the lives of ordinary British people, seen candidly at home, on the street, and at work. As Niklaus Pevsner (another prominent figure featured extensively in the book) had done with *The Buildings of England*, the images in *Picture Post* posited a new way of seeing and recording the British and introducing them to their own image and history.

Hatherley's journey continues to Britain's peripheries. First, Cornwall and Scotland, then Wales – specifically industrial south Wales – where émigré artists settled and painted the workers and miners of that period. Josef Herman's *Miners*, commissioned for the 1951 Festival of Britain and exhibited in Swansea, and Hans Freibusch's murals and mosaics for Newport Civic Centre (above), are standout examples of these works.

Finally, the chapters dedicated to Berthold Lubetkin and town planning deserve mention. Lubetkin is described as 'the most fascinating of all the émigré architects in Britain' owing to the social and political significance of his work and the influence of his practice – Lubetkin and Tecton – which spawned the careers of such luminaries as Denys Lasdun and Peter Moro.

The contribution of Hungarian émigré architect, Ernő Goldfinger – and his renowned rivalry with Lubetkin – is not overlooked. Hatherley's account of the two contemporaries makes for entertaining reading.

The role that central Europeans played in Britain's planning departments is essentially a look into the remaking of large parts of the nation following the second world war.

The London County Council – the 'heartland of *planning*, the biggest and most progressive local authority in the country' – attracted the likes of Vienna-born, Walter Bor, who replanned London's bomb-damaged East End slums, while in Leicester, the Polish planner Konrad Smigielski authored the local authority's revolutionary *Leicester traffic plan*, a radical response to the dominance of the car and the negative effect it was having on city centres.

Other 'disruptors' included here are E F Schumacher, guru of planning counter-culture and author of *Small is Beautiful*, and Walter Segal, an émigré architect and planner 'below only Lubetkin and Goldfinger in terms of the public affection for his work'. The groundbreaking work of planner and sociologist, Ruth Glass, is rightly celebrated here too. Hatherley argues that her interest in the effects of immigration, in studies of cities as they existed, predicted our cities of today.

Owen Hatherley is a compelling storyteller – a personal and engaging style complements his erudition – and this excellent book has not only helped me to better understand the contribution of central European émigrés to the visual arts and architecture, but also my own relationship to Britain and my past.

David Magyar is an alumnus of the Welsh School of Architecture and The Bartlett, and a director of John Robertson Architects.

Book reviews



Architecture and the face of coal: mining and modern Britain

Gary A Boyd —
Lund Humphries

Tim Graham

In Gillian Darley's comprehensive tribute to the outstanding architectural historian, Andrew Saint, who died on 16 July 2025, it was only towards the end that she referred to Saint's book, *Towards a Social Architecture* (1987), his remarkable documenting of the public architecture works of those who served the post-war creation of new schools in the UK. This tale of a state's determination through public architectural service to better the lives of its citizens at scale – and rapidly – in times of austerity should be revisited as our current government seeks to deliver 1.5 million new homes by the end of this parliament, when public architects and planning departments are pared to the bone or erased entirely.

The majority of Saint's life-work was his tireless dedication as general editor to the multi-volume *Survey of London*, so it was only reasonable that Darley's and other obituaries to Saint should focus on the capital and his other two masterworks *The Image of the Architect* (1983) and *Architect and Engineer: A Study in Sibling Rivalry* (2008).

However, in the last few months of Saint's life, in correspondence on social housing matters with Touchstone's editor, he referred to a significant reveal in Gary Boyd's *Architecture and the face of Coal: mining and modern Britain* (2022) highlighting the early life experiences of Raymond Unwin who, with Barry Parker, bestrode so much housing and planning innovation at the turn of the 19th century. Boyd writes that:

'From 1887–1891 he served as an engineering apprentice, draughtsman and ultimately chief draughtsman for the Staveley Coal and Iron Company...his interest in, and absorption of, social and socialist theory was combined not only with a practical knowledge of the intricate workings of the coal industry both under and above ground, but also with activities as a socialist activist and organiser, first in Manchester, and then with the Derbyshire and Nottingham coalfields.'

As you read Boyd's account suddenly all that obsession by Unwin with sunlight and fresh air now has a solid working-class grounding bypassing the effete bourgeois flat-roof patio of deckchaired sun worshippers.

One might think that this matter is only of esoteric interest to historians of housing betterment for those most in need. But, set in the context of Boyd's masterful overview of *Architecture and the face of coal*, suddenly all that lineage of Ebenezer Howard and Parker and Unwin's garden cities segues into this magnificent programme between 1927 and 1940 of 325 pithead baths being delivered at 30 buildings a year across the UK, led initially by the modest public architect par excellence, John Henry Forshaw. Funded by the Miners' Welfare Fund, these baths sat alongside a multitude of other welfare facilities planned and designed for coal communities across the UK, even including as Boyd notes 'the building of twelve thousand houses' by the Industrial Housing Association. From 1946–1955 the number of new pithead baths rose to 622.

1



The National Archives: Coal 80

‘... suddenly all that obsession by Unwin with sunlight and fresh air now has a solid working-class grounding bypassing the effete bourgeois flat-roof patio of deckchaired sun worshippers.’

While much interwar ‘modernism’ served a few progressively wealthy patrons and architectural innovators – and could be ignored by the dominant UK architectural culture as largely the work of immigrant architects fleeing Nazism, passing through on their way to the US (see p.48) – here before our eyes in Boyd’s book are the 622 pithead bath houses delivered by a small team of hugely dedicated young public architects over a period of under 30 years. This proves beyond doubt that intelligently designed and scientifically researched standardised elements, mass-produced and allied to strategic planning ideas can, in the good hands of good architects (in this case influenced hugely by the works of Dudok in Hilversum and Frank Lloyd Wright), be brilliantly manipulated to fit particular contexts and be quite distinct in their treatment, transforming lives in the process through beauty and hope and a modernist mindset.

Boyd sets it all up and fills in a massive gap in socially progressive architecture in the UK. Now what may have seemed like a post-war revolution of public architecture through school design exploding across the home counties, as documented by Saint, now we can read it as a more continuous adventure to make the world a better place through public architecture throughout the 20th century.

The tragedy, as Boyd notes right at the outset in his introduction ‘An architecture of disappearance’, is that so much of this exemplary work has been demolished, erased from the record and the landscape. Many of these initiatives only directly impacted miners, their wives and families. They were hidden from much of the general public’s gaze. The brutal, accelerated pit closures of Thatcher – and the now established view of coal as the bogeyman of the climate crisis – simply adds to us ignoring at our peril what Boyd’s deeply researched story has to tell. Reading Boyd and then Saint, almost as sequential companion volumes of public architecture in the 20th century, should galvanise us all to realise that quality architecture can be delivered at pace and offer us a more positive view of humanity.

Tim Graham is an architectural journalist who has contributed regularly to Touchstone since 1996.

2

The National Archives: Coal 80



3

Architectural Press archive: RIBA collections



4

Miners Welfare Fund – Twelfth report 1935



- 1 Facing page: One of John Henry Forshaw’s ‘south group’ Miners’ Welfare Committee architects, William Traylor, designed the Hafodyrynys pithead baths in Monmouthshire for 998 men. It opened on 28 March 1936
- 2 The Hafodyrynys coal preparation plant completed in 1960 linking Glyntillery, Tirpentwys and Hafodyrynys through new underground roadways to make an integrated major production unit

- 3 ‘The Miner Comes to Town’: an iconic form of a pit’s headgear as a bandstand in Hyde Park, London, 1947. Six colliery bands would play daily to a public audience up until it closed on 25 October.
- 4 Drawing of Midlothian’s Arnister colliery pithead baths at night, by Jack Dempster architect, a member of Forshaw’s ‘north group’. Nicknamed ‘the spaceship’ by local miners, it was opened in 1938.

Book reviews



Cabin Crew Hird and Brooks and the pursuit of the perfect holiday house

Peter Halliday, Bethan Dalton,
Lizzie Biggs, Jessica Halliday —
The Modernist Society

Richard Parnaby

1



Vince Jones

This is an entertainingly idiosyncratic exploration of an extraordinary architectural phenomenon of the 1960s and 70s. It weaves together a portrait of a small, creative south Wales practice, the evolution of the archetypal rustic holiday home and an almost utopian public enterprise destroyed by neo-liberal ideology.

Penarth-based John Hird and Graham Brooks designed a series of elegant modernist houses for individual clients and local developers that deserve to be better known (see *Touchstone*, November 2003, pp. 4–7 and *Touchstone*, 2021 p. 58). While this book refers briefly to these homes – and the more commercial work of the practice – the focus is on their remarkable portfolio of stylish holiday homes. The cabins that Brooks regarded as the highlight of his career.

The structure of the book is unusual. Rather than a chronological narrative it consists of a series of short chapters, each of very different character. A wide-ranging introduction covers the international context of the modern holiday home, the influence of Danish designers on British architects in the post-war years, the practice's fortuitous involvement in cabin design through a local construction company, and the rise and fall of the Forestry Commission's role in tourism. A brief history of the practice, biographies of the two partners and a summary of their architectural ethos (based on an article by Brooks published in the *Western Mail* in 1971) are followed by thoughtful assessments of

their work by Richard Weston, Jonathan Vining and Malcolm House, the last an architect who worked for the practice for almost 30 years. A recurring theme is the influence of Denmark on Brooks's approach to design through a keen interest in the work of Arne Jacobsen and other Scandinavian modernists. This was reinforced by his Danish wife Aase Ginnerup whom he met at the opening of the Jacobsen exhibition at the RIBA in 1959.

In the late 1960s Brooks designed a series of small residential developments in the Cardiff area for the building contractor William Cowlin. Responding to the growing demand for alternatives to traditional beach holidays Cowlin bought a site in west Wales intending to build a holiday village. After a study tour to Denmark with

'... Brooks designed a prototype cabin ... it attracted huge national attention and was visited by Sir Paul Reilly the director of the Design Council and Lord Snowden.'



Cowlin's director, Brooks designed a prototype cabin that was built in the contractor's yard in Cardiff. It attracted huge national attention and was visited by Sir Paul Reilly the director of the Design Council and Lord Snowden.

The holiday village site failed to gain planning permission, but the prototype design inspired an evolving series of sophisticated rural groupings of compact second homes and holiday cabins. Short histories of two key projects, Bierwood at Manorbier and Penlan near Cenarth, are enlivened by interviews with people involved in their design and current owners. These include the sons of both Hird and Brooks, who inherited cabins at Bierwood, and the site's owner who has lived there for 40 years.

In 1975 Brooks heard of the Forestry Commission's emerging plans to fulfil its remit to exploit the recreational potential of its huge land holdings by constructing 20,000 cabins on sites across the UK. He was quick to see an opportunity and contacted the commission, which recognised the relevance of the firm's experience and design approach. Over the following seven years they completed projects in forests in Cornwall, the north of England and Scotland. The arrival of the Conservative government in 1979 put an end to the Forestry Commission cabin building programme. It was revived in the late 1990s in privatised form but there was no further involvement for the practice.

This is a delightful book that tells the story of an innovative Welsh practice informed by a strong Scandinavian design sensibility perfectly attuned to the emerging tastes and needs of their local community. The magazine-like format mixing straightforward description, personal memoir, interviews and architectural critique is a refreshing alternative to the staid architectural monograph. There are many wonderful photographs – with a strong emphasis on the character of interiors. But it is disappointing that, even though the authors had access to the Hird and Brooks archive, there are no plans, sections or construction details.

Richard Parnaby is emeritus professor of architecture at the University of the West of England and was partner in a small practice in Abergavenny until 1996.



1 Facing page and 2, Caban Corgi at Penlan near Cenarth on the river Teifi in west Wales

3, 4 Cowlin prototype in Cardiff



touchstones



NEW THINKING FOR NEWPORT WEST

One overall theme of last August’s ‘placemaking newsletter’ from the Design Commission for Wales (DCfW) was ‘doing things differently’, and unsurprisingly one of the invited contributors was the London practice Ash Sakula Architects.

Ash Sakula was asked to submit a master-planning proposal for a real site rather than just write words. DCfW creatively suggested looking at the whole area around the proposed new Newport West railway station, one of five new stations that intends to encourage a modal shift from private car to train across the region. Ash Sakula didn’t disappoint; the following are excerpts from their submission.

‘Setting aside the site’s flooding constraints, the masterplan rethinks how transport infrastructure in Wales can quietly seed the growth of a real neighbourhood, a place in its own right...

‘The masterplan proposes 1250 homes across 23 hectares, all within walking distance of the railway station, at around 54.4 dwellings per hectare. Not quite double the average house builder density but enough to bring everyday life to the streets. Much of this is delivered through

- Key to Newport West railway station
site plan: Making density feel generous
- a. Car parking
 - b. Parkland walk to the station
 - c. Newport West railway station
 - d. Small enterprise/live/work hub
 - e. Cafes/small enterprise units
 - f. Nurseries/local business
 - g. Community allotment and green



[our] ‘Twins’ typology: stacked duplexes that provide what people value most: a front door onto the street, private outdoor space, and homes that feel personal.

‘Arranged as layered streets rather than isolated plots, these homes form a fine-grain that resists the monotony of cul-de-sacs and disconnected estates. This isn’t a new idea ... Every resident gets meaningful outdoor space: a garden for the ground floor home, and a generous roof terrace for the top floor giving people choice in how they live, grow, and gather...

‘[The new station’s] arrival sequence offers a sense of place rather than transit...

‘Parking is car-lite by design. An orchard-like parking lot for residents and train passengers can be structured with pergolas or double-height timber frames that shelter EV charging, green roofs, and future uses. The neighbourhood is organised around walking and cycling, supported by car clubs, e-bike pools, and delivery drop zones. Less tarmac, more trees and the space saved on roads is returned to convivial streets and shared gardens.

‘Throughout the site, housing is interwoven



with small enterprise spaces...: homes above studios, workshops opening onto quiet yards, small traders alongside front doors ... The neighbourhood supports local enterprise: nurseries, tool sheds, homework clubs, healthcare, and social enterprises sit alongside cafés and shops. Many residents work at least partly from home, drawing more life onto the streets throughout the day and strengthening the area’s viability as a commercial centre...

‘At the southern edge, where the Gwent Levels begin ... the floodplain remains open, with development stepping back to allow the landscape to breathe. Existing trees are kept wherever possible, forming the spine of new green corridors and parkland walks ... This is a calm approach to urban growth: density that supports life without crowding it; a station that feels connected rather than remote; a neighbourhood made up of ordinary, walkable places that add up to something quietly generous.’

An eloquent manifesto deserving of study and debate. Thank you DCfW for commissioning it.

To read the full text go to: <https://dcfw.org/placemaking/making-density-feel-generous/>.





BRIDGING AMBITION

Architect-designed bridges appear now to live in a curious twilight zone when it comes to awards and, sometimes even, proper attribution of their creative origins. As bridge architect Martin Knight has observed, they seem to fall in between the engineering awards, in which they are ignored thinking they are too architectural, and the architectural award juries who think they are too much engineering. Long gone are the days, it seems, of the 2002 Stirling Prize winning ‘lifting eye’ Gateshead bridge by Wilkinson Eyre.

Two railway stations in Wales have been adorned with new bridge structures that certainly offer drama and suggest architectural ambition. Both projects are partnerships between the respective local authorities, (Newport City Council and Monmouthshire County Council), Transport for Wales, Network Rail, and the Welsh Government’s Active Travel Fund programme. Pinning down funding sources is tricky. It would seem at least, as press released, that the Active Travel Fund coughed up the bulk of the money – a feather in the cap of the Labour administration.

The first, at Newport (above), is a £10.5 million, 230-metre-long active travel bridge and ramps connecting Devon Place to Queensway, completed in 2023. It replaced an outdated, unsafe and unpleasant subway, and steep stairway down from Devon Place. The 1:20 ramp gradient has had to handle a drop of 4 to 5 metres, hence its length.

The design credits list is long and complex as it is inevitably in large infrastructure projects. Arup was the client representative and concept engineer to Newport City Council, working closely with Grimshaw Global, (the architect of the 2010 Newport station). They oversaw everything from concept to detail, in dialogue with: the Chepstow-based Cass Hayward, bridge specialist and consulting engineer; the fabricator, Pro Steel from



Pontypool; and Alun Griffiths, contractor from Abergavenny. Detailing is crisp and consistent with well-integrated lighting, with the created public realm landscape at ground level on Queensway designed with Cardiff-based The Urbanists.

Submitted for the RSAW awards and the Dewi-Prys Thomas Award, this startling addition to the city’s public realm only managed a shortlisting on both submissions.

30 miles further up the Manchester line, Abergavenny is now home to another vital piece of active travel infrastructure, the £8.6 million new



Photos by Hutton + Crow

lifts and bridge to the station (below). In public press releases the design is attributed to the originally Dutch, but now ‘global design and consultancy firm for natural and built assets’, Arcadis, which it turns out is the ‘delivery agent’! London’s Davies Maguire was the structural engineer hired by Network Rail originally to explore two bridge/lifts/ramps types for a roll-out programme across many stations. First, was the ‘Beacon’ type working with Haskoll Architects (now absorbed into Ryder Architecture of Newcastle, but now with eight globally placed offices), and then the ‘Frame’ type by Copenhagen architect, Gottlieb Paludan.

Abergavenny is the first installed of the Beacon type, engineered and assembled by Centregreat Engineering of Cardiff. It offers those crossing the bridge the most spectacular introduction to the town laid out in the valley below and a view beyond, to the west, to the Brecon Beacons (how appropriate).

When you look across most other recent station bridge installations on this line and others, Abergavenny certainly stands out by a mile for design ambition. The detailing oversight has not managed to execute the elegance of the earlier CGIs, presumably lost somewhere between Haskoll and Arcadis. Will it reach RSAW or CEW shortlisting in 2026, or even an award? Let’s see.



Patrick Hamney

touchstones



1909



1991

DETERMINATION FOR THE LONG HAUL

The final completion of the restoration of the Grade 1-listed Sker House, Porthcawl by Professor Niall Ferguson, its passionate owner, concludes one of the longest major restoration projects in Wales.

The late 20th century was a golden age of restoration, much undertaken by building preservation trusts, charitable companies backed by generous loans from the Architectural Heritage Fund and grants from government, and the recently established National Lottery, underpinned by bank loans, in an era altogether easier than now.

The Buildings at Risk Trust (BART), of which I was chair, fixed its gaze on Sker in 1990. Having

compiled *The Lost Houses of Wales* back in the 1980s, I was well aware of this awesome, ancient, semi-ruin on the cliff edge of the Porthcawl coast. It was to become part of my life, regularly hair-raising, for the next 15 years.

One end having part collapsed, the local authority required the tenant farmers to move out, though they continued to use the farm buildings close beside. But the landlord refused to sell. The local authority, to its credit, instigated compulsory purchase proceedings. The owner moved the house into a new company with a one-foot curtilage all around, so proceedings had to start again. We never found out his motives, but he lost the sale,

lost the case with costs, and was parted from the house for £1, having wasted a year of everyone's time.

The then young architect Michael Davies came forward to undertake the job and if anyone deserves to be remembered, it is he. Manifestly unsafe, with huge raking shores holding up one end, he relished the challenge. Cadw gave a grant to rebuild the farm buildings away from the house, an essential but innovative use of funds, and the Heritage Lottery Fund and Architectural Heritage Fund made the restoration possible. But trouble, inevitably. The contractors, excellent in their work, went bust half-way through, requiring huge renegotiations, then an early Sunday morning phone call from the police to say the house had been broken into for a rave party causing pointless damage. But we did it, with some fascinating discoveries along the way, including the identification of the secret catholic chapel in the attic. And in 2005 Professor Ferguson came forward to buy it. BART's funding did not allow the collapsed end to be rebuilt, but Niall has now done so beautifully – Sker's second hero. *Thomas Lloyd*

Thomas Lloyd DL OBE is an honorary member of the RSAW.



2002



2024



is surely one of the most moving memorials anywhere. In the tourist season a few people stroll across to it from the back of the little Lloyd George Memorial Museum nearby, via a pair of grandiose gates added by Clough in the early '50s. We were there, more intrepidly, in February 2018, the notorious Beast from the East month. The museum was tight shut. We parked by the bridge and walked a few yards along the lane. To the left, we were beckoned into a spinney dropping down



A MOVING MEMORIAL

'A circle or oval on a steep declivity is hard to design, the more so if it has to harbour a solemn enclosure. What height should the encircling walls have? If there is to be a level surface within, they must be shallow at the top but deep and strong at the bottom, where they must sustain the enclosure against slipping down the slope. How are they to drop? If they are not just to slide, they must step, but where and in what increments? And if the visitor is to make sense of the whole all round, outside as well as inside, there must be stairs from top to bottom. If they are separate, that will detract from the unity of the whole. How much better to clamp them on to the sides of the enclosure, strengthening the walls and prompting one to touch as well look!

'These were the issues Clough Williams-Ellis (1883–1978) solved when he created the deceptively simple-looking grave and memorial to David Lloyd George in the woods outside the Welsh village of Llanystumdwy. At the time, politician and architect alike were as out of fashion as they could be.

'Lloyd George died in 1945, just months before the end of the Second World War. He had asked to be buried not in Westminster Abbey but by the banks of his beloved Dwyfor river, where he had played as a boy and came back in his retirement to sit and watch the water. His friend Clough designed the memorial soon after. Materials and labour were desperately short. But it seems to have been built quickly and opened quietly – in March 1946.

'Yet this site, seldom remembered today,

to the river by a short level path ending at an archway. The light snow clinging to the bare trees and powdering the path, paved with cobbles from the beach at Criccieth, added to the magic.

'The arch is marked by one of those shaped gables Clough made his own, Dutch-Afrikaans in origin maybe, certainly not Welsh. But its material, local rubble, is amply Welsh and gives it weight. It is pierced twice. Above comes an oval opening with pretty ironwork in which the pattern DLG can just be discerned. Below is the entrance gate, of open ironwork again, featuring a flaming urn yet also strangely anthropomorphic. An example of Clough's notorious 'whimsy'? Lloyd George was not unknown for his sense of humour. Or perhaps just a note of sprightliness before one descends to the gravity of death. Over the gate is a slate panel with some lines from a poem by W. R. P. George, the politician's nephew. Added later, it mars the austerity of rubble and ironwork.

'From the gate a couple of steps drop down into the simple enclosure. In the centre of the circumference, slightly raised, is a large stone on which Lloyd George used to sit and watch the river. Originally there were no words, but again tasteful slate panels were later affixed to the back of the arch. It's a shame, but otherwise one might not know what this place is about. The only movement is provided by the walls stepping down in four hefty jumps to a new calm level at the base. It is all modestly and consummately done. Outside again, there are just the embracing steps, then a

sharp drop of twenty yards or so through the trees to the rushing water that breaks the silence.

'Fame is a fickle business. Clough Williams-Ellis is warmly regarded again nowadays, chiefly on account of Portmeirion, not that far from Llanystumdwy. But he is seldom taken for a serious architect. When you look for it, there is a plenty of seriousness to be found in his writings and work besides the Lloyd George Memorial. The belief that we should all enjoy architecture is serious enough – too serious, it seems, for most architects to engage with.

'As for Lloyd George, who outside Wales esteems him today? Yet this was the man who fought like a trojan to bring in old-age pensions and national insurance, and by many accounts saved Britain from crumbling during the First World War. He can reasonably be rated the second greatest prime minister of the twentieth century. The 'Welsh wizard' was tricky of course, and ruthless, and inconsistent – as was Churchill. His reputation was blotted by personal infidelities and by corruption scandals in the early '20s. But he carried on doughtily at the head of an increasingly



marginalized Liberal Party. A speech of his helped Churchill succeed Chamberlain in 1940.

'In short, Lloyd George was a great man. Despite flaws there was a nobility to him, even a modesty too, attested by the burial place he chose in his native village. It rewards a visit – and reflection while you are there.'

These beautifully judged words above on the Lloyd George Memorial, Llanystumdwy were written by the remarkable architectural historian, the late Andrew Saint in July 2020, for the Twentieth Century Society's Building of the Month feature, online at: <https://c20society.org.uk/building-of-the-month/the-lloyd-george-memorial-llanystumdwy>.

Go to <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0oqvnkz> to see Williams-Ellis discuss his designs for the memorial, in the BBC documentary 'A Love Affair with Life: Clough Williams Ellis, Architect and Portmeirion' (first broadcast in January 1971).

A clear central strategy

As *Touchstone* goes to press, the business case approval to fund the substantial additions and alterations to Cardiff Central railway station by Weston Williamson Architects is still awaiting confirmation. The practice is globally respected in the transport infrastructure field and evidence from the approved planning application submission demonstrates we are in good hands.

For decades the capital's main station has been incrementally moving towards balancing up both the northern and southern approaches. In the early 2000s John McAslan + Partners cleared out the tat that had over time undermined the late-1930s northern entrance hall with its sweeping curved west wing. McAslan also improved the atmosphere and movement clarity of the north-south passageways beneath the elevated tracks. The commercial tat inevitably returned to the main hall over time, and clearly Weston Williamson is having another go to clear it for once and for all, as well as sensitively making sizeable building additions to the curiously named platform 0 above that west wing (1).

The most dramatic addition however is on the southern side with a 'landmark' (according to planning officer speak) brickwork, colonnaded, three-storeyed arched entrance building, sorting out at last all the somewhat half-hearted – in transport planning terms – incremental improvements of the early noughties, such as the Seymour Harris southern entrance building (4). This is to be erased.

With this current proposal the proper balancing up of north and south entrances will be complete. The new southern entrance (3, 5) will face directly onto the new ground-level Metro terminus that will take passengers down to Cardiff Bay and eventually beyond. Those coming to live in the as-yet uncompleted massive upscaling of apartment buildings called Central Quay won't have to tramp to work in the city centre through car parks and unpleasant underpasses.

Let's hope the 'Kahnian' language of the Weston Williamson new southern entrance will have gravitas and solidity in its detailing. It certainly has appropriately scaled presence on to the vast new open space that mirrors what some see as the featureless desert of public realm coming out of the northern entrance. (You pay an environmental price for locating an enormously popular entertainment venue – the Principality Stadium – in the very heart of a city.)

A strategic decision has clearly been taken to mark the northern and southern entrances as distinctly separate architectures both in material and form. Nothing is said about this in the Mott MacDonald planning statement, nor in the officers' concluding report to members. Making one cohesive central station architecture seems not to have been an option considered. So, more incrementalism even if it's done with ambition. Others might argue convincingly that it is an honest expression of change over time, and it makes that abundantly clear in the architectural record. It would have been good to see that strategic decision expressed openly as planning committee members gave the fine scheme their nod of approval. ■





If at first you don't succeed, try, try again

Housing scheme after housing scheme have remained in the archive, unbuilt, for Loyn & Co Architects. The earliest was for Phil Roberts of Gwalia for 11 dwellings at Waunarlwydd, Swansea. Then came the Cardiff Bay Porth Teigr scheme for 104 homes for Igloo Regeneration (*Touchstone*, 2017, p. 61). This was followed by Parc Haddau a scheme of 35 affordable homes at Pontardawe (*Touchstone*, 2021, pp. 62–63) for SERO Homes. Like all the others this was never to see the light of day. The practice finally struck lucky after years of tussle with the planners, in completing the Sainte Adresse scheme of 30 flats for Celtic Developments in Penarth.

Now after almost six years of negotiation with

the various authorities and the scheme having to go up to ministerial level for adjudication, the Leckwith Quays scheme for 250 new dwellings for client Phil Worthing was given the go-ahead on 6 June 2025.

Located on a brownfield boundary site between the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff, a dramatic transition site from industrial urban to intense rural, between river and dense hillside woodland, from high-density development to low, the scheme will include a variety of dwellings from riverside townhouses to duplex dwellings and family homes. The site will accommodate between 228 and 250 private-market dwellings. An earlier unsurprisingly rejected scheme by others, proposed 347 dwellings.

Loyn & Co has demonstrated over years a remarkable skill in reading and responding to a variety of sensitive, deeply rural settings for single private dwellings. This vastly scaled-up project at Leckwith responding to both town and country, is the housing challenge of a lifetime for the practice. This is the truly tough one that might set a new benchmark for landscape and housing quality in Wales. Time will tell. ■



A healthy landscape



1



2



3

At the founding of Abergavenny’s Nevill Hall Hospital in the 1960s and, owing to its sizeable building footprint, the renowned landscape architect Sylvia Crowe was commissioned to ensure the very fine landscaped gardens of the original Nevill Hall estate would be complemented by new planting while preserving the best of what remained (3). Nevill Hall Hospital remained for decades as one of the finest landscape settings for any hospital in Wales (4). At the millennium a new large woodland (5), sensory gardens, and exercise areas were added, all under the careful and expert eye of a hospital garden’s team of three. They have all now gone.

Then came seismic changes in health-

provision planning. All serious surgical expertise and maternity care was removed to the specialist and critical care centre at the new BDP-designed Grange University Hospital at Llanfrechfa (*Touchstone*, 2021, pp. 24–29). Morale, sense of purpose, and the level of care for the Nevill Hall landscape has sunk.

Aburst of new activity at Nevill Hall came as IBI Group (now Arcadis) received the commission for a new radiotherapy unit, one of the national ‘spokes’ to the Wales ‘hub and spokes’ cancer treatment provision, centred on the soon-to-be-completed Velindre Cancer Care Centre at Whitchurch, Cardiff (see *Touchstone*, 2023, pp. 78–81).

The radiotherapy unit at Nevill Hall is now complete (2). Substantial trees of the Sylvia Crowe landscape, which offered solace in their prospect of those in the five-storeyed hospital wards, were removed to make way for the unit. The new landscaping of the unit’s perimeter, hammered by the summer drought, curious in its selection of planting, does not promise a Sylvia Crowe-level of landscape ambition.

Then comes RAAC on the horizon; more building demolitions on the Nevill Hall site will be needed. The opportunity for further new services will be envisaged in parallel over the next decade, but in a recent presentation by the health board to county councillors on the hospital’s future, the word landscape was never mentioned. This is troubling. Meanwhile, the grass gets cut by the county council’s countryside services, but no other landscape maintenance occurs. It’s a sorry sight. The Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) commissioned a comprehensive biodiversity report from Mott Macdonald. A local charity has been formed, Nevill Hall Nature Spaces, offering local community-based expertise and energy to halt the further decline. Let’s hope that ABUHB can respond positively and quickly, as they did at the Grange, to this well-intentioned community offer. ■



Tom Williams

4



5

A slippery slope

There are, and have been, many sizeable, varying quality ambitions for 21st-century Merthyr Tydfil. The first came with the 30,250 sqm Trago Mills (2) out-of-town retail store with its mile-long perimeter presenting its curious Boyes Rees-designed elevation of sub-Disney-like towers, prominently on show, to those stepping out of Cyfarthfa Castle Museum on the opposite side of the valley.

Then came a project of far greater social and cultural reach, the ongoing Crucible Project, promoted by Geraint Talfan Davies, with outline designs developed with the local community by Ian Ritchie Architects and landscape designer Gustafson Porter. This was a considerable step up in architectural, landscape and cultural ambition (see *Touchstone*, 2021, pp. 6–11).

As Davies points out (p. 26 of this issue) with major new transport infrastructure recently put in place, the completed dualling of the A465 to the north of Merthyr and the electrification of the Merthyr to Cardiff railway, surely the scene is set for attracting cultural and social investment at scale to turn the economy of Merthyr around?

Into this context has also come the Holder Mathias architects-designed Rhyd-y-car West development proposal, a development ‘anchored around the UK’s longest indoor snow centre, a tropical water park, an indoor and outdoor adventure centre, plus a range of hotel offerings and woodland lodges’. The site, the developer Marvel claims, ‘will be the home and national training headquarters for the Welsh and UK national, Olympic and Paralympic teams’. (1) It states that:



‘The planning officer’s report to the council’s planning committee recommended refusal. The planning committee was minded to ignore that advice, but suddenly in stepped the Welsh Government.’

‘The national governing body for snowsports in Wales, Snowsport Cymru Wales, have campaigned for this facility for nearly a decade; GB Snowsport are also campaigning for this development. The indoor snow centre will conform to International Ski Federation (FIS) and international standards.’

The problem is its siting, but that’s not all.

A Design Commission for Wales (DCfW) report, following a design review panel meeting of the project on 6 October 2022, advised the local authority in Merthyr that it was ‘unable to support the proposal’ setting out its:

‘significant and fundamental concerns in relation to sustainability, quality of design, the visual impact of the proposed development, its impact upon the landscape/landscape character and overall form of the proposed development, and its failure to adhere to both national and local planning policy in *Future Wales* and the local development plan.’

That sounded like a terminating catalogue of rejections. The planning officer’s 60-page report of 4 March 2025 echoed much of DCfW’s critique and more, and recommended refusal of the application to the council’s planning committee. The committee chose to ignore that advice, but suddenly in stepped the Welsh Government. The council received a letter from the Welsh Government advising it ‘not to grant planning permission’ for this ‘or any development of the same kind ... which is proposed on any site forming part of, or includes the land to which the application relates, without the prior authorisation of the Welsh Ministers’.

Eight months after that pause in proceedings, a note appeared on the LinkedIn page of the developer’s planning consultant, Peter Waldren of CarneySweeney, announcing that ‘the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning [Rebecca Evans MS] considered the issues raised by the application were “of a scale and complexity which she is content for the LPA to consider”’. This was confirmed by a decision notice on the Welsh Government’s website dated 13 November 2025 saying that ‘the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning has approved proposals to enable development of land in Merthyr Tydfil’. Behind such a bland summary lies a fundamental question: have we possibly just witnessed the junking of many significant national planning legislation frameworks in Wales? Have we just entered a slippery slope? *Touchstone* will pursue this in 2026.■





1

Key to altering existing and new works isometric

- Alterations to existing
- New building elements
- /// Common ground
- /// External landscape works



2

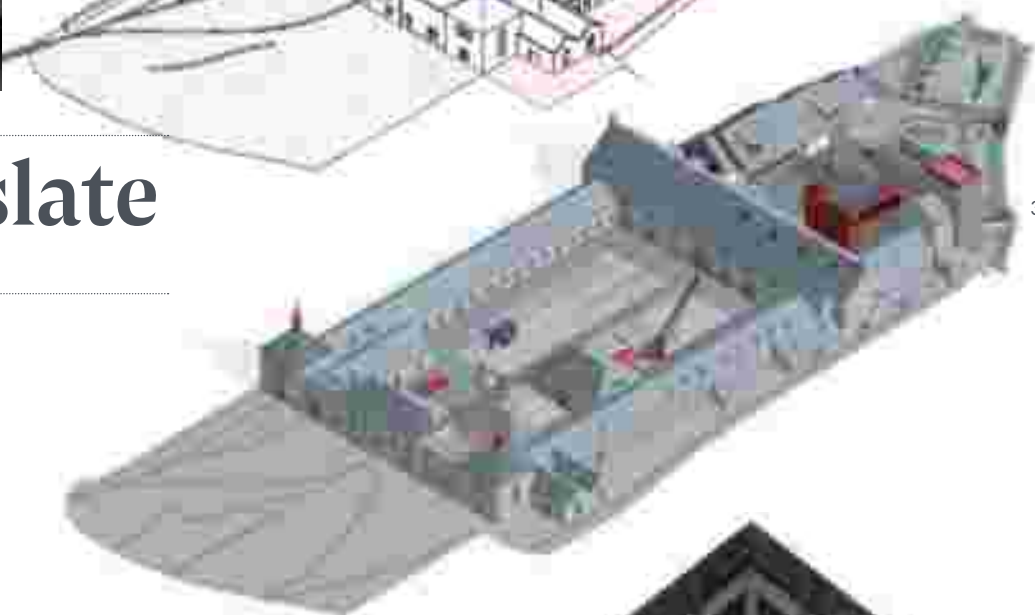
Put it on the slate

Rural Office has submitted plans for what is hoped will be a world-class visitor attraction at the heart of the Welsh slate landscape.

Located in Parc Padarn, Llanberis, and set within Eryri National Park, the National Slate Museum opened in 1972 following the closure of Dinorwig slate quarry (1) in the summer of 1969. The museum was developed in the late 1990s with Heritage Lottery Funding (6). In July 2021 UNESCO designated the Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales as a World Heritage Site. The National Slate Museum and the surrounding landscape of Parc Padarn and Dinorwig quarry is to be a key interpretation site for this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The project, led by Amgueddfa Cymru, will conserve and improve the condition of the site's built heritage, transforming it into an interpretation hub for north-west Wales's slate landscape.

Rural Office's architectural scope was in three parts. First, to preserve and protect the existing grade I-listed structures and scheduled monuments, (shown in the isometric above, 2), ensuring that the story of slate continues to be told for years to come. Second, to refurbish and upgrade specific historic spaces for interpretation and operational use, while respecting their significance (shown in 5) enabling the museum to share more of Amgueddfa Cymru's diverse collections. Third, to create additional contemporary spaces (shown in 4, 7) to meet the accommodation brief of the project, which includes a new learning building, café, and retail facilities (see above). The project has begun on site and is intended to be complete in autumn 2027.



3



4



5



6



7



Theatre renewal

It was great to see Haworth Tompkins's refurbishment and extension of Theatr Clwyd nearing completion when I passed through Mold at the beginning of August. This important, grade-II listed theatre complex of 1976 – set within

a larger but declining post-war civic complex that includes the single remaining part of Shire Hall (1969) and the Magistrates and Crown Court (1969) – looks like it might be an exemplar of how to renew such a post-war heritage asset. Certainly, the new foyer extension provides high-quality, front-of-house space, improved connection with the upper floors (and the surrounding landscape), and an increased civic presence.

The latest in a series of major, high-quality cultural buildings in north Wales this century

following Ruthin Craft Centre (Sergison Bates architects, 2009), Mostyn in Llandudno (Ellis Williams Architects, 2010), and Pontio in Bangor (Grimshaw, 2016) – while Cardiff's 'national concert hall' languishes in the private sector with no confirmed date of when it might re-open – *Touchstone* looks forward reviewing the renewal of Theatr Clwyd in next year's issue. ■

Jonathan Vining.



Quality judgment

Many clients across the UK have appreciated the benefits of trusting their judgement as architectural patrons when selecting Rural Office to design them a new home (see p. 33). Many architects across the UK have appreciated the promotional benefits of designing their own workplaces and homes as exemplars of the quality of skills they can offer to future patrons.

Lead architect of Rural Office based in Carmarthenshire, Niall Maxwell, already has a fine legacy of satisfied domestic clients. But, it will still be instructive to see – no doubt on a much tighter budget than many of his domestic clients – how maybe less is more of the key architectural qualities when, after many patient years, they are applied to his recently completed family home (see left). *Touchstone* will be keen to learn more in 2026. ■

1

Schist stone art

Originally established in 1991 within the repurposed former chapel of the Bon Sauveur convent, Canolfan Ucheldre in Ynys Môn's Holyhead has long been a hub for performance and visual arts, serving as a venue for a wide range of cultural and artistic events, including exhibitions, performances, and workshops. The existing 150-seat performance space in the chapel already hosts concerts, drama, film, and literary events.

The brief given to De Matos Ryan architects was to extend and refurbish the facilities in the existing grade II-listed chapel and then add a dedicated dance studio, art workshop, and shop/entrance space in three new volumes. Through a subtle replanning of the overseeing and shared elements in the existing chapel, this would allow the organisation to host more events and activities simultaneously.

Externally, the architectural language of the angular new forms, supported by concealed timber



- 1 The repurposed former chapel of the Bon Sauveur convent, now Canolfan Ucheldre, with its three proposed additions for an artist's studio, a dance studio, and shop/entrance space.
- 2, 4 Inside and approaching the new entrance.
- 3 Assembling the Price & Myers structurally engineered complex steel-plate connected timber frames.
- 5 View from new biodiverse garden at the rear of site, a tranquil courtyard space referencing the original cloister of the convent demolished in 1988.

frames with complex steel-plate connectors, draws inspiration from the local schist stone of the chapel, but also reflects the geometry of the island's rich geology and extraordinary coastline. Triangular cladding panels of glass-fibre reinforced concrete are used externally to pick out the grey, green and blue tones of the schist stone.

The design features high levels of insulation, high-performance windows, airtight building fabric, thermal-bridge-free construction, and intelligent heat-recovery ventilation. Smart metering, photovoltaic panels with storage batteries, are all part of the low-energy kit.

At the rear of the site a new biodiverse garden is being created featuring beehives, raised planting beds, and wildflower meadows. It is to be a tranquil courtyard referencing the original cloister of the convent demolished in 1988.

The Ucheldre team led by De Matos Ryan architects, working with structural engineer Price & Myers, engaged with local residents, organisations, and schools to gather feedback and incorporate their ideas into the design. 'This project', says Mike Gould, general manager and artistic director of Ucheldre, 'is a testament to the power of community collaboration and a commitment to sustainable design [and is] poised to become an even more vibrant hub for creativity, learning, and cultural exchange'.

This imaginatively expanded cultural facility will add another jewel in the crown of cultural provision in north Wales that includes: Richard Murphy's Galeri in Caernarfon; Grimshaw's Pontio; Manalo & White's Nyth project in Bangor (see pp. 20, 30–32); and finally Sergison Bates's Ruthin Craft centre. What a bevy of riches. So all that remains now is to deliver the equivalent provision to the south Wales Valleys, (see p.26).■

2



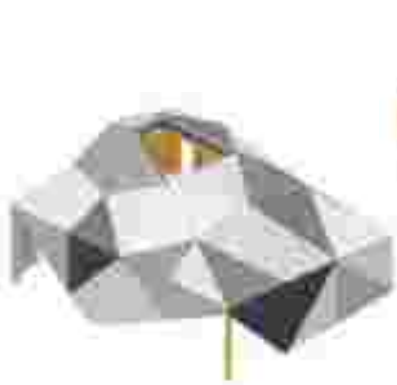
3



Artist's studio



Dance studio



Shop



4



5



Directory 2025

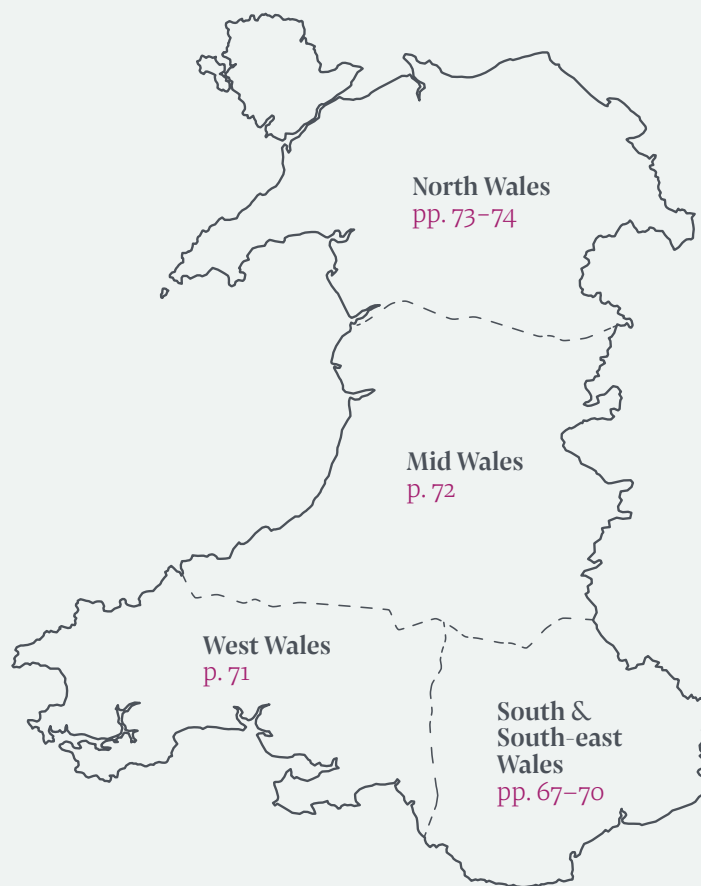
The following pages of Touchstone 2025 comprise a directory of architectural practices in Wales. The directory is divided into four areas, as indicated on the map. Within each area, architectural practices are listed under the town in which (or nearest to which) they operate, in alphabetical order of the business name. At the end of the directory section is a list cross-referencing practice names to page numbers.

All the architects featured in this directory are members of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), which means they are highly skilled professionals trained to turn clients' aspirations into reality. Many also operate their businesses as RIBA Chartered Practices (denoted by * in the listings) indicating that they comply with strict criteria covering insurance, health and safety, and quality management systems.

Architects offer guidance on all the aspects of a building project from design and cost through to planning and construction. Architects have a unique ability to see things from the widest possible perspective as well as focusing on the small things that can make a big difference to a project.

The Royal Society of Architects in Wales and its parent body, the Royal Institute of British Architects, offer a free-of-charge service to tailor a shortlist of practices with the appropriate skills and experience for every type and size of project. The 'Find an Architect' service is available at <https://www.riba.org/explore/find-an-architect/> – and you can also email clientservices@riba.org or ring RSAW on 029 2022 8987.

To find an individual RIBA/RSWA member by name, go to <https://members.architecture.com/directory/default.asp?dir=3>



South & South-east Wales

Abergavenny

CRSH Architecture and Energy*

One the Orchard, Llanellen Road, Llanfoist,
Abergavenny NP7 9NF

CRSH Architecture and Energy are an award-winning RIBA Chartered Architects practice who specialise in design led architecture and energy efficiency. Projects include sensitive and characterful renovations and retrofits of existing buildings and new build schemes, all with good spatial design and the highest level of sustainability at their core. We welcome enquires from all sectors.

Contact: Steven Harris
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mail@crsh-arch.co.uk
www.crsharchitects.co.uk

Barry

Dennis Hellyar Architects*

Pinecroft, Romilly Park Road, Barry,
Vale of Glamorgan CF62 6RN

Dennis Hellyar Architects is an RIBA Chartered Practice. As a dedicated team of architects, based in Barry, South Wales, we create buildings to enhance life through function and form with sustainability at heart. Established in 2013, our small team of residential and commercial architects boasts extensive expertise in new build, extending and renovating of residential and commercial properties, across private and public sectors. Our studio in Barry has worked on public and private projects across South Wales and the South West, including Bristol, Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan and Swansea. Providing Architectural Services for projects at all stages, from Feasibility, Planning and Building Regulations to Construction and Handover. We are passionate about beautiful design that supports low energy and eco-friendly lifestyles, integrating perfectly into local environments. Our architecture and design process is efficient, thorough, and collaborative – client, design and sustainability focused.

Contact: Dennis Hellyar
01446 500720
dh@dennishellyar-architects.com
www.dennishellyar-architects.com

Brecon

Mundo Architecture*

2 Wheat Street, Brecon, Powys LD3 7DG

We work with existing buildings, appreciating their historic character whilst giving them new life, as well as dynamic designs for new build projects. As we focus on both energy efficiency and incorporation of natural & sustainable materials into our projects, we're pleased to have our first Hempcrete new build house under construction. Our Concept designs share a common thread; a journey through spaces that strive to reveal the best of each and every site, with natural light being a key element in our work. We operate pan Wales from our office in Brecon, as well as English borders, Ireland and Cornwall.

Contact: Agnieszka Pearson
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Bridgend

PJL Architect Limited

Suite 1: 5 – 7 Court Road, Bridgend, CF31 1BE

We are an established architect's practice based in Bridgend town centre and offer bespoke building design and management services. We undertake projects both in the commercial and residential sectors with a construction value generally ranging from £100k to £5m. This includes new-build, refurbishment and conservation work.

Our main area of operation is within the South East Wales area, which includes Bridgend County, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

01656 660 004
info@pjl-a.com
www.pjl-a.com

Cardiff

Arden Kitt*

7 Warren Drive, Caerphilly, CF83 1HQ

Arden Kitt is a people focussed RIBA Chartered Practice that has been delivering Architects services throughout South Wales and the South West of England since 2006. With a design philosophy centred on crafting solutions that celebrate people and place, we enjoy working with clients looking for environmentally responsible, contemporary architecture. Our portfolio includes a range of bespoke designs for discerning homeowners, community groups, and business clients who value the firms practice's exceptional service and professionalism.

Contact: Chris Brimble
029 2132 8155
ardenkitt@ardenkitt.co.uk
www.ardenkitt.co.uk

Arcadis*

Suite 4D, Hodge House, 114-116 St Mary Street,
Cardiff, CF10 1DY

Proud recipient of a 2022 RSAW Welsh Architecture Award and RIBA Chartered Practice with specialists across commercial, defence, education, healthcare, science and knowledge-based R&D, residential and senior living sectors. We are a team of dedicated professionals who share a common desire – to help our clients create liveable, sustainable, urban environments. Our experience encompasses architecture, urban design and masterplanning, interior design and landscape architecture. Approved across all leading procurement Frameworks, we're delivering exemplary built environments with sustainable outcomes. We understand the importance of vision and strategy as well as the practical requirements of delivery, working with our partners from inception through RIBA 0-7 stages including post-occupancy review.

Contact: Carys Fisher, Principal
029 2092 6700
07500 097922
carys.fisher@arcadis.com
www.arcadis.com

Ashley DAVIES Architects Limited

15 Pickwick Close, Thornhill, Cardiff CF14 9DA

ADA specialises in historic building conservation – repairing, restoring and adapting historic and listed buildings – and the design of insertions and extensions to historic buildings. We also undertake and prepare Heritage Assessments, Heritage Impact Statements, Conservation Plans and Detailed Condition Assessments, and provide assistance with funding applications. Principal, Ashley Davies, is a Chartered Architect, an RIBA-accredited Specialist Conservation Architect and a Supporter of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation, with 32 years' experience.

Contact: Ashley Davies
07413 000761
ashleydaviesarchitects@gmail.com
www.ashleydaviesarchitects.co.uk

Austin-Smith:Lord Ltd*

18 Park Place, Cardiff CF10 3DQ

Enhancing Life and Environments by Design.

Austin-Smith:Lord provides services in architecture, conservation, interior, landscape, urban design and masterplanning. With a world-wide portfolio of award-winning projects across a wide range of sectors, we employ around 50 people in four studios. Encouraged by a legacy of innovative leadership, all members of the practice are committed to achieving architecture of the highest order, combining commercial viability and sustainability with intelligent and elegant design solutions. As a highly collaborative and creative practice with a commitment to quality, we consistently provide our clients with a level of design and service excellence that exceeds expectations. Additional studios in Bristol, Glasgow and Liverpool.

Contact: Martin Roe

029 2022 5208

cardiff@austinsmithlord.com

www.austinsmithlord.com

Benjamin Hale Architects

The Coachhouse, 143 Donald Street, Roath, Cardiff, CF24 4TP

We are an architecture and interior design studio based in London and Wales, working across the United Kingdom. Benjamin Hale established the practice following a number of years at leading architectural studios, where he gained experience designing spaces for culture, art, and living. We work across a wide range of projects, from the careful refurbishment of historic buildings and homes to the design of new houses in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

As an office we work collaboratively as a team to deliver projects of quality and sensitivity that are meticulously detailed, durable and considered. This would not be possible without the strong group of Architects, craftsmen, builders and engineers that we have the pleasure of working with.

Contact: Benjamin Hale

07415 150 594

info@benjaminhale.co.uk

www.benjaminhale.co.uk

Brian MacEntee Architecture & Design*

Top Floor Mackintosh House, 136 Newport Road, Cardiff CF24 1DJ

BMAD Ltd is an award winning, design led practice with experience of working across several different sectors, working with existing buildings is a speciality we pride ourselves in, but we also deliver new build housing, education and light industrial buildings. Our services include architectural design, interior design, project co-ordination, planning applications and construction detail design working packages. Offering the right advice and design solutions, we often implement our in-depth knowledge of the current permitted development legislation, to ensure our projects achieve planning permission. We work collaboratively with clients, contractors and consultants to produce innovative designs that cater to individual requirements, creating spectacular spaces but within the client brief and budget from the outset.

Contact: Brian MacEntee

029 2049 0237

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www.bmadltd.co.uk

DB3 Architecture*

2 Callaghan Square, Cardiff CF10 5BT

DB3 Architecture is a leading, award-winning consultancy providing an architecture-led, multi-disciplinary service including architectural design, project co-ordination, building services design, low carbon design consultancy, drone surveying, interior design and conservation. Our approach to design and operations provides a comprehensive, client focused service for schemes throughout the UK. Creativity is at the heart of our service and we focus on the development of real value for our clients. We challenge ourselves to envision and deliver projects that make a positive difference to our clients.

Contact: Bruce Massie

07769 704248

Bruce.Massie@db3group.com

www.db3group.com

Downs Merrifield Architects*

The Studio, 5 Cefn Coed Crescent, Cardiff CF23 6AT

Downs Merrifield Architects specialise in high end residential and hospitality work, bringing design quality and a highly personalised service to all our clients. We believe that well-designed environments which optimise daylight and are crafted from natural materials, create environmentally sustainable buildings which will be long lasting and exceed expectations. Our niche practice has grown from the two founding partners' many years of experience in the commercial and luxury sectors, plus our new partner Rob Boltman. This has enabled us to create a unique perspective to all of our designs, combining practical sustainability with attention to detail, together with full virtual reality rendering. Our projects include one-off homes (including Passive Haus), residential refurbishments, hotels, large housing developments, listed buildings and a green energy park.

Contact: Nic Downs, Carolyn Merrifield

029 2167 2672

info@downsmerrifield.com

www.downsmerrifield.com

Gaunt Francis Architects*

23 Womanby Street, Cardiff CF10 1BR

Gaunt Francis Architects is a creative commercial design studio that blends business acumen and technical excellence with design creativity. Formed in 1997, the practice has delivered award-winning projects throughout the UK from its offices in London and Cardiff. The practice has an enviable reputation in its four work sectors – working, caring, living and learning. We strive for environmentally responsible, cost-efficient, beautiful places and buildings; passionately believing that good design will always create value. Additional offices in London.

Contact: Toby Adam

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www.gauntfrancis.co.uk

Hiraeth Architecture*

The Maltings, East Tyndall Street, Cardiff CF24 5EA

Hiraeth Architects: Embracing the past, creating the future.

Whether we're making a relic relevant or a house a home, we combine a deep understanding of the site with innovative, low carbon, low impact design.

We put our clients at the heart of our process and are best known for our twin specialisms:

- Low carbon design, including Passivhaus certification, using natural based materials for high performance, whole building systems.
- The conservation, alteration and evolution of sites and buildings of sensitive and specialist interest.

Contact: Rob Thomas

029 2002 5814

office@hiraetharchitecture.co.uk

www.hiraetharchitecture.co.uk

HLM Architects*

Hodge House, 114-116 St Mary's Street, Cardiff CF10 1DY

HLM is an award winning, leading design practice which combines flair, imagination and passion to create innovative, sustainable places for people. Our talented team offer a holistic set of design skills including Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Interior Design, Environmental Design and Master-Planning.

We work across a wide range of sectors, including Education, Healthcare, Defence, Hospitality, Leisure & Culture, Justice & Emergency, Regeneration, Residential and Workplace throughout the UK. Working as one team with our additional studio's in London, Sheffield, Glasgow, Belfast and Dublin.

We create places of education that inspire, healthcare environments that nurture, homes that are part of thriving communities, and infrastructure that is sustainable in every sense. Our design philosophy put people at its centre.

Contact: Gareth Woodfin, Studio Director

Holder Mathias LLP*

The Maltings, East Tyndall Street, Cardiff, CF24 5EA

Holder Mathias has designed, crafted and delivered buildings of enduring value for over fifty years. Our reputation is built upon high quality design within a sound commercial framework, creating solutions that make a real contribution to our clients' success. Operating throughout the UK and into Europe from Cardiff and London, Holder Mathias combines specialist expertise in retail, leisure, hospitality, urban residential and workplace design together with a recognised approach to integrated, sustainable mixed-use development.

Whether providing strategic advice on complex mixed-use schemes, specialist leisure and hospitality design expertise, or technical resources for construction; Holder Mathias brings a powerful combination of creativity, commercial awareness, commitment and the capacity to deliver.

Contact: Stephen Hill

029 2049 8681

07715 476667

enquiries@holdermathias.com

www.holdermathias.com

Jon James Studio Architecture

The Maltings, East Tyndall Street, Cardiff, CF24 5EA

Jon James Studio Architecture is based in Cardiff and Cowbridge. Jon founded the studio which is grounded in sustainable design. Jon is a highly experienced Architect and the studio works across all sectors. We specialise in one-off homes, large-scale housing schemes including both private/council projects and education Passivhaus design. Jon has a reputation for being able to work closely with his clients to create and deliver buildings that not only meet their individual requirements but exceed their expectations. Jon, a certified Passive House Designer and Conservation Architect, has a passion for conservation architecture and sustainable, quality design. Additional offices in Cowbridge.

Contact: Jon James

07920 834 210

jon@jjstudioarchitecture.co.uk

www.jjstudioarchitecture.co.uk

Kotzimuth Williams Architects*

Canton House, 435–451 Cowbridge Road East, Cardiff CF5 1JH

Established in 2003, our Cardiff based practice provides a bespoke design service tailored to each individual client.

We aim to create well considered modern buildings that are sympathetic to their surroundings. Our designs are a response to our clients objectives, the location, landscape, views and orientation. A significant number of our projects are in sensitive contexts, including work to listed buildings and within conservation areas.

We take pride not just in our design work but also in our understanding of construction, materials and detailing that makes for complete service.

Contact: Siôn Williams

029 2178 0001

office@kwarchitects.com

www.kwarchitects.com

Latter Davies*

6 Park Grove, Cardiff CF10 3BN

We aim to combine creativity with a rigorous approach, providing elegant solutions and efficient buildings responding to the needs of users and the environment.

Experience across a spectrum of building types in the private, public and charitable sectors throughout Wales and beyond, including;

- the adaptation and refurbishment of listed and historic buildings.
- healthcare and special needs care buildings.
- private housing; new-build, remodelling, refurbishment.

Yn darparu gwaith creadigol a gwasanaeth drylwyr ledled Cymru a thu hwnt.

Contact: Gwyn Davies

029 2023 1833

admin@latterdavies.co.uk

www.latterdavies.co.uk

Lawray Architects*

Southgate House, Wood Street, Cardiff, CF10 1EW

With over five decades of experience across diverse sectors, we combine creativity with technical excellence. Our guiding principle is simple: to make the everyday inspirational.

We design buildings that stand the test of time, enriching the lives of those who use them and strengthening the communities around them.

With studios in Cardiff, Wrexham and London, our core principles revolve around honouring local identity, uniting stakeholders' visions, and crafting outstanding results that benefit our clients.

Contact: Chloe Allen

0330 912 7100

cardiff@lawray.co.uk

www.lawray-architects.co.uk

Pentan Architects*

22 Cathedral Road, Pontcanna, Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Pentan Architects is an award-winning design practice, with over 25 years' experience in the residential and supported living sectors. The practice holds an excellent reputation in innovation and sustainable design. People are central to our architecture and we are exponents of place-making as critical to all projects. Our portfolio of work extends across Wales and the South West, ranging from small innovative housing projects to specialist care-homes and extra-care housing, and large residential developments and master-planning.

Contact: Andrew Hole / Alun Lock

029 2030 9010

info@pentan.co.uk

www.pentan.co.uk

Prichard Barnes Architects*

18 St Andrews Crescent, Cardiff CF10 3DD

Prichard Barnes Architects is a contemporary British architectural practice based in Cardiff. Led by its founding partners, architects Shaun Prichard and James Barnes, the practice is committed to excellence in architectural design. Prichard Barnes Architects can provide a full architectural design service from concept design to construction supervision. The practice has successfully embedded thoughtful design and sustainable principles using Building Information Modelling (BIM).

Contact: Shaun Prichard

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shaun@prichardbarnes.co.uk

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Rowlands Architecture*

13 Pencisely Rise, Cardiff CF5 1DX

Rowlands Architecture has particular experience in the residential sector but has also worked on commercial, healthcare, and religious buildings. We seek to create well proportioned, beautifully crafted, functional, and sustainable spaces and have worked extensively on historic and listed buildings. We take a down to earth and professional approach, working collaboratively with client and contractors, tailoring a design to suit tastes, needs and budget. Additional office in Bristol.

Contact: Tom Rowlands

07725 557198

info@rowlandsarchitecture.com

www.rowlandsarchitecture.com

Sillitoe Architecture

24 Caerleon Road, Cardiff CF14 3DR

Sillitoe Architecture is a Christian architectural practice, providing an idiosyncratic approach to achieving the aspirations of our clients. Using traditional drawing and model-making techniques, the practice provides a friendly and professional service, and is dedicated to sustainability, the conservation of the natural world, and the historic environment.

Services include building design, interior design, planning and building regulation applications, project management, CDM principal designer, and listed building consent applications.

Consultancy: design and access statement writing; heritage impact assessments; hand-drawn and painted illustrations to an extremely high standard.

Contact: Geoffrey R. Sillitoe

07833 961798

geoff@geoffreysillitoe.com

www.geoffreysillitoe.com

Stride Treglown*

Treglown Court, Dowlais Road, Cardiff CF24 5LQ

Stride Treglown's Cardiff studio is proudly focused on the needs of our clients and the people that use our projects, creating inspiring, sustainable spaces that genuinely work. Our diverse portfolio includes award winning schools, exemplary higher education buildings, cutting edge tech and innovation facilities, patient-centric healthcare schemes and leading edge environmental residential design. With over 25 years in Wales, our Cardiff studio is one of Stride Treglown's nine regional offices across the UK. We are a certified B Corporation, and an employee-owned practice with creativity and technical excellence at the heart of everything we do. We create space and places that people love to use.

Contact: Pierre Wassenaar

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www.stridetreglown.com

TDArchitect*

19 Conybeare Road, Victoria Park, Cardiff CF5 1GB

TDArchitect provide architectural design and consultancy services for people, businesses and organisations across Wales and SW England.

Our range of services cover everything from CAD drafting; eco-refurbishment advice; feasibility studies and surveys; planning and tender advice and on-site, contract and project management. Recognising that every project is unique, we provide a personal service tailored towards your particular brief and budget, producing individual design solutions to exceed your expectations and requirements.

Contact: Cathryn Teagle-Davies

029 2034 2465

info@tdarchitect.co.uk

www.tdarchitect.co.uk

Chepstow

Hall + Bednarczyk Architects*

The Coachworks, 12A Lower Church Street, Chepstow NP16 5HJ

Hall + Bednarczyk Architects has gained prominence as one of Wales's leading practices, with a track record of multiple RIBA award-winning projects for residential, commercial and public architecture. It aims to create confident well-judged modern buildings in contexts which are frequently sensitive and multi-layered, including pristine landscapes, protected historic buildings and conservation areas.

Hall + Bednarczyk won the National Eisteddfod Gold Medal for Architecture and RIBA Welsh Building of the Year for Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water's Visitor & Watersports centres at Llandegfedd Reservoir. Over the past six years the practice's residential projects have been selected for RIBA's House of the Year on three occasions, winning regional awards and appearing on Channel 4's *Grand Designs House of the Year*.

Contact: Martin Hall

01291 627 777

mail@hallbednarczyk.com

www.hallbednarczyk.com

Newport

KWL Architects Limited*

Poplar House, Hazell Drive, Newport NP10 8FY

KWL Architects is a multi-award-winning Practice, based in Newport. Originally formed in 2001, in 2023 the Practice ownership was transferred to an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT). The Practice has significant expertise in the design and development of Care Villages, Extra Care Housing, Care Homes and Specialist care facilities, as well as undertaking a range of other commissions.

The Practice has completed developments throughout the UK, for a broad range of clients including charitable trusts, housing associations, not for profit organisations, as well as commercial developer/operators.

Contact: Sally Morgan

01633 817171

kwl@kwlarchitects.co.uk

www.kwlarchitects.co.uk

Roberts Limbrick Architects*

1 Gold Tops, Newport NP20 4PG

Roberts Limbrick are a team of over 100 talented and ambitious creatives with offices in Gloucester, Newport and London. Our architects understand how people interact with places, and they use this knowledge to make a positive impact in every design. Our approach is solution-led and collaborative from start to finish. Each project is unique, but joined in the common aims of improving lives, connecting communities, and enhancing our environment. By combining capability with creativity, we produce eye-catching designs that maintain the balance between form and function. We offer a full range of architectural services as well as landscape, interior design, urban design, masterplanning, consultancy and 3D modelling. We work within a variety of sectors, including healthcare, education, commercial, sport and leisure, community, residential and mixed-use. With over 25 years of experience and a varied portfolio of successful projects, we can work together to design spaces that work for our clients.

Contact: Mark Jones

03333 405500

mark.jones@robertslimbrick.com

www.robertslimbrick.com

Sustainable Studio Architects*

One Gold Tops, Newport NP20 4PG

Sustainable Studio Architects is a RIBA Chartered Practice based in Newport, South Wales. The practice offers full architectural services across all RIBA stages from concept design through to on site project management. The studio prides itself on high-quality and creative design with a focus on sustainable; architecture, developments & technologies.

We work closely with our clients and collaboratively as part of a wider design team. The practice provides architectural and planning services to; commercial, domestic and contractor clients with specialisms in; healthcare, education, retail fit-out, listed buildings/conservation, ecclesiastical, residential and the leisure sector. The practice promotes technical excellence paired with a responsive and considered design approach with completed projects located all over the UK.

Contact: Aled Jones or Jack Davies

01633 741101

info@sustainablestudio.co.uk

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Penarth

Loyn + Co*

88 Glebe Street, Penarth, Vale of Glamorgan CF64 1EF

Principal Architect Chris Loyn set up practice in 1987 and founded LOYN+CO over 30 years ago in 1992. From the outset we have been one of the few architects in Wales to champion contemporary design. During its history the practice has enjoyed recognition for its achievements in architecture through published projects and many significant awards and nominations including RIBA Stirling Prize, various RIBA Awards including winning The Manser Medal twice (the only Practice ever to do so), Sunday Times House of the Year and the Eisteddfod Gold Medal for Architecture which the practice has won three times.

The practice philosophy favours working as a team, operating in a studio environment where we share ideas and collectively review design development through each stage of a project's evolution. With a wide range of experience, specialisms and skills our team is committed to delivering high quality schemes true to their original concept, relevant to our time and unique to their site and to their client.

Contact: Chris Loyn, James Stroud, Victoria Coombs

029 2071 1432

architecture@loyn.co.uk

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West Wales

Carmarthen

Nicole Jones Architect RIBA*
6 Myrddin Crescent, Carmarthen SA31 1DX

We offer modern sustainable architecture as well as the refurbishment of listed buildings and barn and chapel conversions. Our style is always approachable and professional.

The practice is involved in a broad range of projects from residential to small commercial projects. We also specialise in refurbishment of dental surgeries.

We undertake work in Wales, Southern England and Germany.

07969 516075
n@nicolejones-architect.co.uk
www.nicolejones-architect.co.uk

Haverfordwest

David Haward Associates Ltd*
Twill Dwrgi, Goat Street, St David's,
Haverfordwest SA62 6RQ

We are a well-established Practice with a reputation with both clients and contractors, for providing high quality designs that maximise the building's potential and meet our clients' expectations. Several contractors have used the Practice when extending or making alterations to their own homes, due to our innovative design and well-coordinated drawings, which allow ease of construction on site. Additional office in Clynderwen.

Contact: David Haward
01437 729090
mailedhaarchitects.co.uk
www.dhaarchitects.co.uk

Oochitecture*
The Royal, Trafalgar Terrace, Broad Haven,
Haverfordwest SA62 3JU

Oochitecture is a creative practice based in Broad Haven, Pembrokeshire. We deliver projects for our clients across South Wales and beyond. Passionate about both design and the process of building, we enjoy taking projects from inception to completion guiding our clients along the way.

We have a wide range of experience including residential, education and commercial projects and provide full design services and project management.

Contact: Michael Bool
01437 457 501
07508 884 988
info@oochitecture.com
www.oochitecture.com

Narberth

Steve Hole Architects LLP
7 Northfield Road, Narberth, Pembrokeshire SA67 7AA

Steve Hole RIBA has been proudly practising architecture in Narberth since 1981. Over the years, we've built our reputation on a genuine passion for creating homes and spaces that truly work for the people who live and work in them. While we specialise in domestic architecture, our experience also extends to a wide range of commercial projects.

We've developed a strong understanding of how to spot the potential in sites and buildings — from early planning feasibility studies through to working with local developers to bring those opportunities to life.

As a long-established local practice, we're also here to help homeowners with one-off projects, conversions, and extensions. We especially enjoy working with historic and listed buildings, carefully balancing their character with the needs of modern living.

Contact: Steve Hole
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Pembroke

Acanthus Holden Architects*
Watermans Lane, The Green, Pembroke,
Pembroke Dock SA71 4NU

Acanthus Holden is a RIBA Chartered Architectural Practice that has provided comprehensive design services extending from inception to completion on site for more than 25 years, with an established reputation for Building Conservation, and the Creative Reuse of old buildings.

The practice is also acknowledged as one that pursues an environmentally sensitive and sustainable approach to projects, which in recent years has extended to the design of several Passive House buildings in West Wales.

The practice is made up of 2 conservation accredited architects, 3 RIBA part II architects and 3 architectural assistants. Acanthus Holden can provide both architectural and planning services for projects, a desirable and streamlined combination for many clients.

Contact: Peter Holden
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www.acanthus-holden.co.uk

Pembroke Dock

Pembroke Design Ltd*
16 Meyrick Street, Pembroke Dock,
Pembrokeshire SA72 6UT

PDL Architects & Surveyors offer a friendly, client focussed service by our experienced design and technical team. We create better buildings and environments that are environmentally sensitive and highly sustainable. Through close communication and good design, we work to better our client's expectations on every project, contemporary or traditional, providing cost effective, highly sustainable and stimulating spaces in which to live, work or learn.

Contact: Julian Mansel-Thomas
01646 683 439
pdock@pembrokedesign.co.uk
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Tenby

Argent Architects*
1 Montrose, Penally, Tenby SA70 7PU

Our striking buildings tend to favour engineered timber post and beam technology – for its warmth, human scale, and endless spacial possibilities (applied to a wider range of projects than our high-end houses featured in *Touchstone* 2022). The practice has made the most of a sustained boost from Tenby Lifeboat House on Grand Designs... and continues to make waves. Check out the website!

Contact: Michael Argent
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Whitland

BABB Architects Limited*
Landsker Business Centre, Llwynybrain,
Whitland SA34 0NG

BABB Architects Limited is an architectural practice based in West Wales, which also provides a planning consultancy and historic building consultancy. The practice is new, but its staff have 30 years of experience of working in West Wales. Linda Jones, Director, is a Chartered Architect, Chartered Town Planner and also has experience lead designer on a number of Passivhaus projects.

The practice is involved in a broad range of projects from residential, education, mixed use, community use, commercial and feasibility studies.

The practice regularly uses its planning and conservation in-house skills to add value to and enhance the service it provides with the aim of producing high quality, sensitive, sustainable designs, for new building and the creative re-use of existing buildings.

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linda@babb-architects.cymru
www.babb-architects.cymru

Mid Wales

Aberystwyth

DB3 Architecture*

30 Heol y Wig, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 2LN

DB3 is an architecture-led, multi-disciplinary consultancy including architectural design, surveying, conservation and project management. Our approach to design and operations provides a comprehensive, client focused and fully bilingual service for public and private projects throughout Wales. Our office at Aberystwyth specialises in housing, education, community, cultural, library and conservation projects. We have a local, dedicated and experienced team who take pride in the wide range of architectural projects we deliver.

Contact: Iwan Thomas
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iwan.thomas@db3group.com
www.db3group.com

Mathew Tench Architects and Associates Ltd

Studio 2, Creative Arts Unit, Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Penglais Campus, Aberystwyth University, Ceredigion SY23 3LG

We provide the full range of architectural services, including design, planning permission, building regulation approval, ecological advice and building contract administration.

The business was founded by Mathew Tench who has worked in Mid Wales for 28 years and possesses a wealth of experience in design, planning and project management. We approach every job as a unique challenge and exciting opportunity to build unique spaces meeting each client's criteria and enhance the quality of the environment.

Contact: Mathew Tench
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mathew@mathewtencharchitects.co.uk
www.mathewtencharchitects.co.uk

Machynlleth

George + Tomos Penseiri: Architects Cyf*

Cambrian House, 12 Heol Penrallt, Machynlleth, Powys SY20 8AL

George + Tomos was established in 2003 by Arwyn George and Dafydd Tomos, who have extensive experience of projects throughout Wales and beyond. Based in Machynlleth, we offer a bilingual service and combine creative design ideas with the use of sustainable construction techniques. We are an experienced team with a real passion for our work, always aiming to ensure the best results for our clients. We make buildings that work well, make the best possible use of site and budget, are technically and ecologically advanced, and suit their surroundings and context.

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georgetomos@yahoo.co.uk
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Newtown

Hughes Architects*

29 Broad Street, Newtown, Powys SY16 2BQ

The practice was established in 2001 with the aim of bringing high quality architecture, learnt in big cities across the world to Mid Wales. Within two years the practice had grown considerably and had projects across the UK and whilst the geographical spread of our projects is still vast, our core values remain the same, wherever we have the pleasure to be working. We have expanded to provide architectural design and planning services to support our clients on a range of schemes.

We are a close-knit team drawn from a variety of backgrounds and experience and this is reflected in our work. We enjoy working in this wonderful part of the world, learning with our clients and creating their dreams. Additional offices in Aberystwyth and Welshpool.

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enquiries@hughesarchitects.co.uk
www.hughesarchitects.co.uk

Welshpool

Hughes Architects*

18 Berriew Street, Welshpool SY21 7SQ

The practice was established in 2001 with the aim of bringing high quality architecture, learnt in big cities across the world to Mid Wales. Within two years the practice had grown considerably and had projects across the UK and whilst the geographical spread of our projects is still vast, our core values remain the same, wherever we have the pleasure to be working. We have expanded to provide architectural design and planning services to support our clients on a range of schemes.

We are a close-knit team drawn from a variety of backgrounds and experience and this is reflected in our work. We enjoy working in this wonderful part of the world, learning with our clients and creating their dreams. Additional offices in Newtown and Aberystwyth.

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North Wales

Bala

Rhys Llwyd Davies – Architect | Pensaer*

Swyddfa Heulwen, 29 Y Stryd Fawr, Y Bala, Gwynedd LL23 7AG

Rhys Llwyd Davies runs a small rural practice working mostly in North and Mid Wales. We regularly work on a range of projects including domestic, public and commercial buildings. The practice was established with the aim of improving the rural built environment by concentrating on the character of buildings, spirit of place, and sustainability. We encourage a contemporary vernacular architectural language and have established a reputation for sensitive alterations / renovations of traditional and historic buildings.

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Conwy

Matthew Jones Architects*

115 Station Road, Deganwy, Conwy LL31 9EJ
Unit 4, Broncoed House, Wrexham Road, Mold CH7 1HP

We are a small, award winning, fresh thinking, RIBA Chartered Practice based in Conwy and Mold, working throughout North Wales, Chester and Cheshire. Whether it is a modest domestic remodel of your home, a new build residential project or something of a grander scale, we take the same pride and commitment to get the best of your project. We take a collaborative approach that produces responsive, sustainable and visually exciting buildings for our clients.

Contact: Matthew Jones
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Saer Architects

11 Ashdown House, Riverside Business Park, Benarth Road, Conwy LL32 8UB

Saer are a team of architects based in Conwy, with projects covering North Wales and North West England. We have over 30 years combined experience working in housing, regeneration, agricultural, education and masterplanning. We are a young practice with a strong passion for sustainable and community led design. We offer a bilingual service and aim to work closely with our clients to deliver contemporary high-quality buildings that complement their surroundings and context.

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Dolgellau

Eric Edwards

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A well-established multi-award winning small rural practice since 1977 operating within the heart of Snowdonia National Park and throughout north and mid Wales. Specialising in works on listed buildings, barn conversions, single dwellings, commercial buildings, including dental & vet surgeries, sports buildings, caravan parks and sites for shepherds' huts and pods. Providing bilingual service.

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Hawarden

Ainsley Gommon Architects*

The Old Police Station, 15 Glynne Way, Hawarden, Flintshire CH5 3NS

Ainsley Gommon is a leading Chartered Practice of Architects and urban designers with a broad range of experience that includes housing, extra care, supported living, urban regeneration, education, healthcare, industrial, conservation and community projects. By promoting environmental responsibility and innovation in all our projects, we adopt a low-carbon approach in the design, construction and operation of our buildings and landscape designs and are signatories to the Placemaking Wales Charter. We work proactively and collaboratively with clients, consultants and contractors, using the latest BIM technology, to deliver high quality projects on time and within budget. Additional offices in Birkenhead, Merseyside.

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Llangefni

Ap Thomas Cyf

C/o Russell Hughes Cyf

Ap Thomas was established in the 1930s and is one of the oldest Architectural practices in North Wales. Recently, Owain D. Evans of Russell Hughes Cyf has taken on the responsibility of continuing the legacy of his father, Gwilym Evans, who was formerly a senior partner at Ap Thomas. Our aim is to uphold the excellent reputation of Ap Thomas Cyf and to continue providing the same high standard of service in both English and Welsh.

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Russell-Hughes Cyf*

56 Bridge Street, Llangefni, Ynys Môn LL77 7HH

Russell-Hughes Cyf is an RIBA Chartered Practice originally formed in 1989. Since formation, the practice has developed a wide range of completed building projects both in the public and private sectors. The diversity of the commissions undertaken is a feature of the practice's work.

The practice has a track record of successful commissions in the Conservation, educational, commercial, residential, leisure, health and community care, industrial and museum sectors. Current project values range from £10,000 to £4.5million. In addition to its base in Llangefni, Russell-Hughes Cyf.

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Mynytho

Huw Meredydd Owen / V&O*

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Creu cysylltiad rhwng cymdeithas a'i gwerthoedd, meithrin ei chyfoeth drwy greu "lle". Creu pensaernïaeth anweledig efallai?

Making a connection between society and its values, nurturing its richness by creating "place". Creating 'invisible' architecture, perhaps?

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Pwllheli

Dobson:Owen*

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Practis penseiri siartredig profiadol ac amryddawn, wedi leoli ym Mhwllheli ac yn gweithio drost Pen Llŷn a Gwynedd, sydd yn cyfuno creadigrwydd hefo arbenigedd technegol ac agwedd pragmatig i wireddu prosiectau.

An experienced and versatile chartered architects practice, based in Pwllheli and working allover the Llŷn Peninsula and Gwynedd, that combines creativity with technical expertise and a pragmatic approach to realising projects.

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Wrexham

Hughes:O'Hanlon Architects*

The Loft, Chesney Court, Wrexham LL13 7YP

At Hughes:O'Hanlon we believe architecture is about making life better, about shaping vibrant communities by creating places and spaces that have a positive impact on their users, and on the immediate and wider environment.

We are highly experienced across a wide range of sectors and building types including education, residential, industrial, commercial, sports & leisure and emergency services.

We understand the dialogue required to achieve successful architecture and are proud to have nurtured many long-standing client relationships.

We believe our buildings should be underpinned by a powerful idea: the idea should be an intelligent and logical response to functionality and a sense of place; and the power of that idea should be embedded in the built form.

We should 'tread carefully but build with conviction'.

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Lawray Architects*

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Wrexham LL13 7YP

With over five decades of experience across diverse sectors, we combine creativity with technical excellence. Our guiding principle is simple: to make the everyday inspirational.

We design buildings that stand the test of time, enriching the lives of those who use them and strengthening the communities around them.

With studios in Wrexham, Cardiff and London, our core principles revolve around honouring local identity, uniting stakeholders' visions, and crafting outstanding results that benefit our clients.

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TACP Architects Ltd*

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TACP operates extensively in Wales and the North West as well as delivering projects both Nationally and Internationally. We have a wide range of prestigious Clients and valued individual businesses within the industry that require the delivery of complex and challenging projects.

We are Quality Assured Practice accredited to ISO 9001:2015 and 14001:2015. We can assist Clients with projects that are required to be BIM compliant and are experienced in delivering projects that achieve Net Zero, BREEAM, LEED and Passivhaus.

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A different level of extraction

Despite the repetitive referencing in every planning application to the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*, the practical policy implications for architectural practice seem frequently out of reach. Ten of the Welsh Government's reporting indicators that might be linked to the work of architects, as Claire Melhuish suggests (pp. 16–21), 'fall short of recognising the role that the architectural profession can play'. She suggests this may mean that what is required is 'a more visually modest architectural language and less extractive approach to material resources, while also redefining which sectors of society architectural service should prioritise'. The constant over-shooting of carbon targets to keep us within 1.5 degrees C may reinforce the need for this substantial degrowth refocus to serve those with the most critical needs. Four stories in this issue, two in south Wales and two in the North, may cause us to reflect on this.

The evocative cover paintings by Barbara Castle (and on p. 4) record the outcome of an earlier architecture of extraction. Those communities still await a healing of that brutal extraction that the well-being act should deliver. They wait in frustration, but for how long? Can architecture help?

Cover artworks: Barbara Castle worked in the field of community regeneration and engagement from the mid-1970s as development worker, researcher, project manager, adviser to local and Welsh governments, teacher and writer, working across all sectors from local voluntary groups to universities, housing associations, private sector architects, and planners.

She has a particular sense of injustice about the underinvestment in, and physical desecration of, the south Wales valleys, and how the ubiquitous terraces have been underappreciated as a unique urban form.

Since retirement Barbara has focused on her painting and tries to capture the valleys' infrastructure and urban form through her abstract impressions.

Her work can be found on-line at www.barbaracastleart.com | email: castlebarbs2@yahoo.co.uk

An essay about her thoughts can be found here:

<https://cynonvalleymuseum.wales/cynon-valley-museum-gift-shop/artist-directory/barbara-castle/>

